

Subaltern Studies II

Writings on South Asian History
and Society

Edited by
RANAJIT GUHA

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Preface

The contributions to this volume of *Subaltern Studies* are addressed to a wide range of topics extending in time from the Mughal period to the nineteen-seventies, in theme from communalism to industrial labour, and in manner from the descriptive to the conceptual. Taken together, they are witness to our concern to enlarge the scope of our project into all aspects of the subaltern condition, material as well as spiritual, past as well as present. For, with all their variety these writings are held together by a common emphasis on the primacy of the subaltern as the subject of historical and sociological enquiry.

Such an emphasis does not, however, commit the authors to any cast-iron identity of thinking on every detail of fact and approach. For it is not the aim of this volume, nor indeed of this series as a whole, to set up yet another little sect of seers with access to the ultimate truth about South Asian history and society. We claim no more than to speak for a new orientation within which many different styles, interests and discursive modes may find it possible to unite in their rejection of academic elitism and in their acknowledgement of the subaltern as the maker of his own history and the architect of his own destiny. As such we regard this and the other volumes of the series as one of a number of possible sites where intellectual practices which are all opposed to elitism may come together and engage in a mutually non-antagonistic but by no means mutually uncritical debate in order to learn from each other, correct each other, and through that very process enrich each other. The essays assembled here represent a small beginning in the direction of that convergence.

Ranajit Guha

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The Prose of Counter-Insurgency¹

RANAJIT GUHA

I

When a peasant rose in revolt at any time or place under the Raj, he did so necessarily and explicitly in violation of a series of codes which defined his very existence as a member of that colonial, and still largely semi-feudal society. For his subalternity was materialized by the structure of property, institutionalized by law, sanctified by religion and made tolerable—and even desirable—by tradition. To rebel was indeed to destroy many of those familiar signs which he had learned to read and manipulate in order to extract a meaning out of the harsh world around him and live with it. The risk in ‘turning things upside down’ under these conditions was indeed so great that he could hardly afford to engage in such a project in a state of absent-mindedness.

There is nothing in the primary sources of historical evidence to suggest anything other than this. These give the lie to the myth, retailed so often by careless and impressionistic writing on the subject, of peasant insurrections being purely spontaneous and unpremeditated affairs. The truth is quite to the contrary. It would be difficult to cite an uprising on any significant scale that was not in fact preceded either by less militant types of mobilization when other means had been tried and found wanting or by parley among its principals seriously to weigh the pros and cons of any recourse to arms. In events so very different from each other in context, character and the composition of participants such as the Rangpur *dhing* against Debi Sinha (1783), the Barasat *bidroha* led by Titu Mir (1831), the Santal *hool* (1855) and the ‘blue mutiny’ of 1860 the

¹ I am grateful to my colleagues of the editorial team for their comments on an initial draft of this essay.

Note: For a list of Abbreviations used in the footnotes of this chapter, see p. 40.

protagonists in each case had tried out petitions, deputations or other forms of supplication before actually declaring war on their oppressors.² Again, the revolts of the Kol (1832), the Santal and the Munda (1899-1900) as well as the Rangpur *dhing* and the jacqueries in Allahabad and Ghazipur districts during the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857-8 (to name only two out of many instances in that remarkable series) had all been inaugurated by planned and in some cases protracted consultation among the representatives of the local peasant masses.³ Indeed there is hardly an instance of the peasantry, whether the cautious and earthy villagers of the plains or the supposedly more volatile *adivasis* of the upland tracts, stumbling or drifting into rebellion. They had far too much at stake and would not launch into it except as a deliberate, even if desperate, way out of an intolerable condition of existence. Insurgency, in other words, was a motivated and conscious undertaking on the part of the rural masses.

Yet this consciousness seems to have received little notice in the literature on the subject. Historiography has been content to deal with the peasant rebel merely as an empirical person or member of a class, but not as an entity whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion. The omission is indeed dyed into most narratives by metaphors assimilating peasant revolts to natural phenomena: they break out like thunder storms, heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires, infect like epidemics. In other words, when the proverbial clod of earth turns, this is a matter to be explained in terms of natural history. Even when this historiography is pushed to the point of producing an explanation in rather more human terms it will do so by assuming an identity of nature and culture, a hall-mark, presumably, of a very low state of civilization and exemplified in 'those periodical outbursts of crime and lawlessness to which all wild tribes are subject', as the first historian of the Chuar rebellion put it.⁴

² The instances are far too numerous to cite. For some of these see *MDS*, pp. 46-7, 48-9 on the Rangpur *dhing*; *BC 54222: Metcalfe & Blunt to Court of Directors* (10 April 1832), paras 14-15 on the Barasat uprising; W. W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal* (7th edition; London, 1897), pp. 237-8 and *JP*, 4 Oct. 1855: 'The Thacoor's Perwannah' for the Santal *hool* C. E. Buckland, *Bengal Under the Lieutenant-Governors*, vol. I (Calcutta, 1901), p. 192 for the 'blue mutiny'.

³ See, for instance, *MDS*, pp. 579-80; *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh*, vol. IV (Lucknow, 1959), pp. 284-5, 549.

⁴ J. C. Price, *The Chuar Rebellion of 1799*, p. *cl*. The edition of the work used in this essay is the one printed in A. Mitra (ed.), *District Handbooks: Midnapur* (Alipore, 1953), Appendix IV.

Alternatively, an explanation will be sought in an enumeration of causes—of, say, factors of economic and political deprivation which do not relate at all to the peasant's consciousness or do so negatively—triggering off rebellion as a sort of reflex action, that is, as an instinctive and almost mindless response to physical suffering of one kind or another (e.g. hunger, torture, forced labour, etc.) or as a passive reaction to some initiative of his superordinate enemy. Either way insurgency is regarded as *external* to the peasant's consciousness and Cause is made to stand in as a phantom surrogate for Reason, the logic of that consciousness.

II

How did historiography come to acquire this particular blind spot and never find a cure? For an answer one could start by having a close look at its constituting elements and examine those cuts, seams and stitches—those cobbling marks—which tell us about the material it is made of and the manner of its absorption into the fabric of writing.

The corpus of historical writings on peasant insurgency in colonial India is made up of three types of discourse. These may be described as *primary*, *secondary* and *tertiary* according to the order of their appearance in time and their filiation. Each of these is differentiated from the other two by the degree of its formal and/or acknowledged (as opposed to real and/or tacit) identification with an official point of view, by the measure of its distance from the event to which it refers, and by the ratio of the distributive and integrative components in its narrative.

To begin with primary discourse, it is almost without exception official in character—official in a broad sense of the term. That is, it originated not only with bureaucrats, soldiers, sleuths and others directly employed by the government, but also with those in the non-official sector who were symbiotically related to the Raj, such as planters, missionaries, traders, technicians and so on among the whites and landlords, moneylenders, etc. among the natives. It was official also in so far as it was meant primarily for administrative use—for the information of government, for action on its part and for the determination of its policy. Even when it incorporated statements emanating from 'the other side', from the insurgents or their allies for instance, as it often did by way of direct or indirect reporting in the body of official correspondence or even more characteristically as 'enclosures' to the latter, this was done only as a part of an

argument prompted by administrative concern. In other words, whatever its particular form—and there was indeed an amazing variety ranging from the exordial letter, telegram, despatch and communiqué to the terminal summary, report, judgement and proclamation—its production and circulation were both necessarily contingent on reasons of State.

Yet another of the distinctive features of this type of discourse is its immediacy. This derived from two conditions: first, that statements of this class were written either concurrently with or soon after the event, and secondly, that this was done by the participants concerned, a ‘participant’ being defined for this purpose in the broad sense of a contemporary involved in the event either in action or indirectly as an onlooker. This would exclude of course that genre of retrospective writing in which, as in some memoirs, an event and its recall are separated by a considerable hiatus, but would still leave a massive documentation—‘primary sources’ as it is known in the trade—to speak to the historian with a sort of ancestral voice and make him feel close to his subject.

The two specimens quoted below are fairly representative of this type. One of these relates to the Barasat uprising of 1831 and the other to the Santal rebellion of 1855.

TEXT 1⁵

To the Deputy Adjutant General of the Army

Sir,

Authentic information having reached Government that a body of *Fanatic Insurgents* are now committing *the most daring and wanton atrocities on the Inhabitants* of the Country in the neighbourhood of Tippy in the Magistracy of Baraset and have set at defiance and repulsed the utmost force that the local Civil Authority could assemble for their apprehension, I am directed by the Hon’ble Vice President in Council to request that you will without delay Communicate to the General Officer Commanding the Presidency Division the orders of Government that one Complete Battalion of Native Infantry from Barrackpore and two Six Pounders manned with the necessary complement (sic) of Golundaze from Dum Dum, the whole under the Command of a Field Officer of judgement and decision, be immediately directed to proceed

⁵ BC 54222: JC, 22 Nov. 1831: ‘Extract from the Proceedings of the Honorable the Vice President in Council in the Military Department under date the 10th November 1831’. Emphasis added.

and rendezvous at Baraset when they will be joined by 1 Havildar and 12 Troopers of the 3rd Regiment of Light Cavalry now forming the escort of the Hon'ble the Vice President.

2nd. The Magistrate will meet the Officer Commanding the Detachment at Barraset and will afford the necessary information for his guidance relative to the position of the Insurgents; but without having any authority to interfere in such Military operations as the Commanding Officer of the Detachments may deem expedient, for the purpose of routing or seizing or in the event of resistance destroying those who persevere in *defying the authority of the State* and *disturbing the public tranquil[li]ty*.

3rd. It is concluded that the service will not be of such a protracted nature as to require a larger supply of ammunition than may be carried in Pouch and in two Tumbrils for the Guns, and that no difficulties will occur respecting carriage. In the contrary event any aid needed will be furnished.

4th. The Magistrate will be directed to give every assistance regarding supplies and other requisites for the Troops.

Council Chamber

I am & ca

10th November 1831

(Sd.) Wm. Casement Coll.

Secy. to Govt. Mily. Dept.

TEXT .

From W. C. Taylor Esqre.

To F. S. Mudge Esqre.

Dated 7th July 1855

My dear Mudge,

There is a great gathering of Sontals 4 or 5000 men at a place about 8 miles off and I understand that they are all well armed with Bows and arrows, Tulwars, Spears & ca. and that *it is their intention to attack all the Europeans round and plunder and murder them. The cause of all this is that one of their Gods is supposed to have taken the Flesh and to have made his appearance at*

⁶ JP, 19 July 1855: Enclosure to letter from the Magistrate of Murshidabad, dated 11 July 1855. Emphasis added.

some place near this, and that it is his intention to reign as a King over all this part of India, and has ordered the Sontals to collect and put to death all the Europeans and influential Natives round. As this is the nearest point to the gathering I suppose it will be first attacked and think it would be best for you to send notice to the authorities at Berhampore and ask for military aid as it is not at all a nice look out being murdered and as far as I can make out this is a rather serious affair.

Sreecond

Yours & ca

7th July 1855

/Signed/ W. C. Taylor

Nothing could be more immediate than these texts. Written as soon as these events were acknowledged as rebellion by those who had the most to fear from it, they are among the very first records we have on them in the collections of the India Office Library and the West Bengal State Archives. As the evidence on the 1831 *bidroha* shows,⁷ it was not until 10 November that the Calcutta authorities came to recognize the violence reported from the Barasat region for what it was—a full-blooded insurrection led by Titu Mir and his men. Colonel Casement's letter identifies for us that moment when the hitherto unknown leader of a local peasantry entered the lists against the Raj and thereby made his way into history. The date of the other document too commemorates a beginning—that of the Santal *hool*. It was on that very day, 7 July 1855, that the assassination of Mahesh daroga following an encounter between his police and peasants gathered at Bhagnadihi detonated the uprising. The report was loud enough to register in that note scribbled in obvious alarm at Sreecond by an European employee of the East India Railway for the benefit of his colleague and the *sarkar*. Again, these are words that convey as directly as possible the impact of a peasant revolt on its enemies in its first sanguinary hours.

III

None of this instantaneousness percolates through to the next level—that of the secondary discourse. The latter draws on primary discourse as *matériel* but transforms it at the same time. To contrast the two types one could think of the first as historiography in a raw, primordial state or as an embryo yet to be articulated into an organism with

⁷ Thus, BC 54222: JC, 3 Apr. 1832: Alexander to Barwell (28 Nov. 1831).

discrete limbs, and the second as the processed product, however crude the processing, a duly constituted if infant discourse.

The difference is quite obviously a function of time. In the chronology of this particular corpus the secondary follows the primary at a distance and opens up a perspective to turn an event into history in the perception not only of those outside it but of the participants as well. It was thus that Mark Thornhill, Magistrate of Mathura during the summer of 1857 when a mutiny of the Treasury Guard sparked off jacqueries all over the district, was to reflect on the altered status of his own narrative in which he figured as a protagonist himself. Introducing his well-known memoirs, *The Personal Adventures And Experiences Of A Magistrate During The Rise, Progress, And Suppression Of The Indian Mutiny* (London, 1884) twenty-seven years after the event he wrote:

After the suppression of the Indian Mutiny, I commenced to write an account of my adventures . . . by the time my narrative was completed, the then interest of the public in the subject was exhausted. Years have since passed, and an interest of another kind has arisen. The events of that time have become history, and to that history my story may prove a contribution . . . I have therefore resolved to publish my narrative . . .

Shorn of contemporaneity a discourse is thus recovered as an element of the past and classified as history. This change, aspectual as well as categorial, sites it at the very intersection of colonialism and historiography, endowing it with a duplex character linked at the same time to a system of power and the particular manner of its representation.

Its authorship is in itself witness to this intersection and Thornhill was by no means the only administrator turned historian. He was indeed one of many officials, civilian and military, who wrote retrospectively on popular disturbances in rural India under the Raj. Their statements, taken together, fall into two classes. First, there were those which were based on the writers' own experience as participants. Memoirs of one kind or another these were written either at a considerable delay after the events narrated or almost concurrently with them but intended, unlike primary discourse, for a public readership. The latter, an important distinction, shows how the colonialist mind managed to serve Clio and counter-insurgency at the same time so that the presumed neutrality of one could have hardly been left unaffected by the passion of the other, a point to

which we shall soon return. Reminiscences of both kinds abound in the literature on the Mutiny, which dealt with the violence of the peasantry (especially in the North Western Provinces and central India) no less than with that of the sepoy. Accounts such as Thornhill's written long after the event, were matched by near contemporary ones such as Dunlop's *Service and Adventure with Khakee Ressallah; or Meerut Volunteer Horse during the Mutinies of 1857-58* (London, 1858) and Edwards' *Personal Adventures during the Indian Rebellion in Rohilcund, Futtehghur, and Oudh* (London 1858) to mention only two out of a vast outcrop intended to cater for a public who could not have enough of tales of horror and glory.

The other class of writings to qualify as secondary discourse is also the work of administrators. They too addressed themselves to a predominantly non-official readership but on themes not directly related to their own experience. Their work includes some of the most widely used and highly esteemed accounts of peasant uprisings written either as monographs on particular events, such as Jamini Mohan Ghosh's on the Sannyasi-and-Faqir disturbances and J. C. Price's on the Chuar Rebellion, or as statements included in more comprehensive histories like W. W. Hunter's story of the Santal *hool* in *The Annals of Rural Bengal*. Apart from these there were those distinguished contributions made by some of the best minds in the Civil Service to the historical chapters of the *District Gazetteers*. Altogether they constitute a substantial body of writing which enjoys much authority with all students of the subject and there is hardly any historiography at the next, that is, tertiary level of discourse that does not rely on these for sustenance.

The prestige of this genre is to no mean extent due to the aura of impartiality it has about it. By keeping their narrative firmly beyond the pale of personal involvement these authors managed, if only by implication, to confer on it a semblance of truth. As officials they were carriers of the will of the state no doubt. But since they wrote about a past in which they did not figure as functionaries themselves, their statements are taken to be more authentic and less biased than those of their opposite numbers whose accounts, based on reminiscences, were necessarily contaminated by their intervention in rural disturbances as agents of the Raj. By contrast the former are believed to have approached the narrated events from the outside. As observers separated clinically from the site and subject of diagnosis they are

supposed to have found for their discourse a niche in that realm of perfect neutrality—the realm of History—over which the Aorist and the Third Person preside.

IV

How valid is this claim to neutrality? For an answer we may not take any bias for granted in this class of historical work from the mere fact of its origin with authors committed to colonialism. To take that as self-evident would be to deny historiography the possibility of acknowledging its own inadequacies and thus defeat the purpose of the present exercise. As should be clear from what follows, it is precisely by refusing to *prove* what appears as obvious that historians of peasant insurgency remain trapped—in the obvious. Criticism must therefore start not by naming a bias but by examining the components of the discourse, vehicle of all ideology, for the manner in which these might have combined to describe any particular figure of the past.

The components of both types of discourse and their varieties discussed so far are what we shall call segments. Made up of the same linguistic material, that is strings of words of varying lengths, they are of two kinds which may be designated, according to their function, as indicative and interpretative. A gross differentiation, this is meant to assign to them, within a given text, the role respectively of reporting and explaining. This however does not imply their mutual segregation. On the contrary they are often found embedded in each other not merely as a matter of fact but of necessity.

One can see in *Texts 1* and *2* how such imbrication works. In both of them the straight print stands for the indicative segments and the italics for the interpretative. Laid out according to no particular pattern in either of these letters they interpenetrate and sustain each other in order to give the documents their meaning, and in the process endow some of the strings with an ambiguity that is inevitably lost in this particular manner of typographical representation. However, the rough outline of a division of functions between the two classes emerges even from this schema—the indicative stating (that is reporting) the actual and anticipated actions of the rebels and their enemies, and the interpretative commenting on them in order to understand (that is to explain) their significance.

The difference between them corresponds to that between the two

basic components of any historical discourse which, following Roland Barthes' terminology, we shall call *functions* and *indices*.⁸ The former are segments that make up the linear sequence of a narrative. Contiguous, they operate in a relation of solidarity in the sense of mutually implying each other and add up to increasingly larger strings which combine to produce the aggregative statement. The latter may thus be regarded as a sum of micro-sequences to each of which, however important or otherwise, it should be possible to assign names by a metalinguistic operation using terms that may or may not belong to the text under consideration. It is thus that the functions of a folk-tale have been named by Bremond, after Propp, as *Fraud, Betrayal, Struggle, Contract*, etc. and those of a triviality such as the offer of a cigarette in a James Bond story designated by Barthes as *offering, accepting, lighting, and smoking*. One may perhaps take a cue from this procedure to define a historical statement as a discourse with a name subsuming a given number of named sequences. Hence it should be possible to speak of a hypothetical narrative called 'The Insurrection of Titu Mir' made up of a number of sequences including *Text 1* quoted above.

Let us give this document a name and call it, say, *Calcutta Council Acts*. (Alternatives such as *Outbreak of Violence* or *Army Called Up* should also do and be analysable in terms corresponding to, though not identical with, those which follow.) In broad terms the message *Calcutta Council Acts* (C) in our text can be read as a combination of two groups of sequences called *alarm* (a) and *intervention* (b), each of which is made up of a pair of segments—the former of *insurrection breaks out* (a') and *information received* (a'') and the latter of *decision to call up army* (b') and *order issued* (b''), one of the constituents in each pair being represented in its turn by yet another linked series—(a') by *atrocities committed* (a₁) and *authority defied* (a₂), and (b'') by *infantry to proceed* (b₁), *artillery to support* (b₂) and *magistrate to co-operate* (b₃). In other words the narrative in this document can be written up in three equivalent steps so that

⁸ My debt to Roland Barthes for many of the analytic terms and procedures used in this section and generally throughout this essay should be far too obvious to all familiar with his 'Structural Analysis of Narratives' and 'The Struggle with the Angel' in Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (Glasgow, 1977), pp. 79-141, and 'Historical Discourse' in M. Lane (ed.), *Structuralism, A Reader* (London, 1970), pp. 145-55, to require detailed reference except where I quote directly from this literature.

C ≡	(a + b).....	I
≡	(a' + a'') + (b' + b'').....	II
≡	(a ₁ + a ₂) + a'' + b' + (b ₁ + b ₂ + b ₃).....	III

It should be clear from this arrangement that not all the elements of step II can be expressed in micro-sequences of the same order. Hence we are left at step III with a concatenation in which segments drawn from different levels of the discourse are imbricated to constitute a roughly hewn and uneven structure. In so far as functional units of the lowest denomination like these are what a narrative has as its syntagmatic relata its course can never be smooth. The hiatus between the loosely cobbled segments is necessarily charged with uncertainty, with 'moments of risk' and every micro-sequence terminates by opening up alternative possibilities only one of which is picked up by the next sequence as it carries on with the story. 'Du Pont, Bond's future partner, offers him a light from his lighter but Bond refuses; the meaning of this bifurcation is that Bond instinctively fears a booby-trapped gadget.'⁹ What Barthes identifies thus as 'bifurcation' in fiction, has its parallels in historical discourse as well. The alleged commitment of atrocities (a₁) in that official despatch of 1831 cancels out the belief in the peaceful propagation of Titu's new doctrine which had already been known to the authorities but ignored so far as inconsequential. The expression, *authority defied* (a₂), which refers to the rebels having 'set at defiance and repulsed the utmost force that the local Civil Authority could assemble for their apprehension', has as its other if unstated term his efforts to persuade the Government by petition and deputation to offer redress for the grievances of his co-religionists. And so on. Each of these elementary functional units thus implies a node which has not quite materialized into an actual development, a sort of zero sign by means of which the narrative affirms its tension. And precisely because history as the verbal representation by man of his own past is by its very nature so full of hazard, so replete indeed with the verisimilitude of sharply differentiated choices, that it never ceases to excite. The historical discourse is the world's oldest thriller.

V

Sequential analysis thus shows a narrative to be a concatenation of

⁹ Barthes, *Images-Music-Text*, p. 102.

not so closely aligned functional units. The latter are dissociative in their operation and emphasize the analytic rather than the synthetic aspect of a discourse. As such they are not what, by themselves, generate its meaning. Just as the sense of a word (e.g. 'man') is not fractionally represented in each of the letters (e.g. M, A, N) which make up its graphic image nor of a phrase (e.g. 'once upon a time') in its constituting words taken separately, so also the individual segments of a discourse cannot on their own tell us what it signifies. Meaning in each instance is the work of a process of integration which complements that of sequential articulation. As Benveniste has put it, in any language 'it is dissociation which divulges to us its formal constitution and integration its signifying units'.¹⁰

This is true of the language of history as well. The integrative operation is carried out in its discourse by the other class of basic narrative units, that is, *indices*. A necessary and indispensable correlate of *functions* they are distinguished from the latter in some important respects:

Indices, because of the vertical nature of their relations are truly semantic units: unlike 'functions' . . . they refer to a signified, not to an 'operation'. The ratification of indices is 'higher up' . . . a paradigmatic ratification. That of functions, by contrast, is always 'further on', is a syntagmatic ratification. *Functions* and *indices* thus overlay another classic distinction: functions involve metonymic relata, indices metaphoric relata; the former correspond to a functionality of doing, the latter to a functionality of being.¹¹

The vertical intervention of indices in a discourse is possible because of the disruption of its linearity by a process corresponding to dystaxia in the behaviour of many natural languages. Bally who has studied this phenomenon in much detail finds that one of several conditions of its occurrence in French is 'when parts of the same sign are separated' so that the expression, 'elle a pardonné' taken in the negative, is splintered and re-assembled as 'elle ne nous a jamais plus pardonné'.¹²

¹⁰ Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale, I* (Paris, 1966), p. 126. The original, 'la dissociation nous livre la constitution formelle; l'intégration nous livre des unités signifiantes', has been rendered somewhat differently and I feel, less happily, in the English translation of the work, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Florida, 1971), p. 107.

¹¹ Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, p. 93.

¹² Charles Bally, *Linguistique Générale et Linguistique Française* (Berne, 1965), p. 144.

Similarly the simple predicative in Bengali 'shé jābé' can be re-written by the insertion of an interrogative or a string of negative conditionals between the two words to produce respectively 'shé ki jābé' and 'shé nā hoy nā jābé'.

In a historical narrative too it is a process of 'distension and expansion' of its syntagm which helps paradigmatic elements to infiltrate and reconstitute its discrete segments into a meaningful whole. It is precisely thus that the co-ordination of the metonymic and metaphorical axes is brought about in a statement and the necessary interaction of its functions and indices actualized. However these units are not distributed in equal proportions in all texts: some have a greater incidence of one kind than of the other. As a result a discourse could be either predominantly metonymic or metaphorical depending on whether a significantly larger number of its components are syntagmatically ratified or paradigmatically.¹³ Our *Text I* is of the first type. One can see the formidable and apparently impenetrable array of its metonymic relata in step III of the sequential analysis given above. Here at last we have the perfect authentication of the idiot's view of history as one damn'd thing after another: *rising - information - decision - order*. However, a closer look at the text can detect chinks which have allowed 'comment', to worm its way through the plate armour of 'fact'. The italicized expressions are witness to this paradigmatic intervention and indeed its measure. Indices, they play the role of *adjectives* or *epithets* as opposed to verbs which, to speak in terms of homology between sentence and narrative, is the role of functions.¹⁴ Working intimately together with the latter they make the despatch into more than a mere register of happenings and help to inscribe into it a meaning, an interpretation so that the protagonists emerge from it not as peasants but as '*Insurgents*', not as Musalman but as '*fanatic*'; their action not as resistance to the tyranny of the rural elite but as '*the most daring and wanton atrocities on the inhabitants*'; their project not as a revolt against zamindari but as '*defying the authority of the State*', not as a search for an alternative order in which the peace of the countryside would not be violated by the officially condoned anarchy of semi-feudal landlordism but as, '*disturbing the public tranquil[li]ty*'.

If the intervention of indices 'substitutes meaning for the straight-

¹³ Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (London, 1967), p. 60.

¹⁴ Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, p. 128.

forward copy of the events recounted,¹⁵ in a text so charged with metonymy as the one discussed above, it may be trusted to do so to an even greater degree in discourses which are predominantly metaphorical. This should be evident from *Text 2* where the element of comment, italicized by us, largely outweighs that of report. If the latter is represented as a concatenation of three functional sequences, namely, *armed Santals gathering*, *authorities to be alerted* and *military aid requested*, it can be seen how the first of these has been separated from the rest by the insertion of a large chunk of explanatory material and how the others too are enveloped and sealed off by comment. The latter is inspired by the fear that Sreecond being '*the nearest point to the gathering . . . will be first attacked*' and of course '*it is not at all a nice look out being murdered*'. Notice, however, that this fear justifies itself *politically*, that is, by imputing to the Santals an '*intention to attack . . . plunder . . . and put to death all the Europeans and influential Natives*' so that '*one of their Gods*' in human form may '*reign as a King over all this part of India*'. Thus, this document is not neutral in its attitude to the events witnessed and put up as 'evidence' before the court of history it can hardly be expected to testify with impartiality. On the contrary it is the voice of committed colonialism. It has already made a choice between the prospect of Santal self-rule in Damin-i-Koh and the continuation of the British Raj and identifies what is allegedly good for the promotion of one as fearsome and catastrophic for the other—as '*a rather serious affair*'. In other words the indices in this discourse—as well as in the one discussed above—introduce us to a particular code so constituted that for each of its signs we have an antonym, a counter-message, in another code. To borrow a binary representation made famous by Mao Tse-tung,¹⁶ the reading, '*It's terrible!*' for any element in one must show up in the other as '*It's fine!*' for a corresponding element and vice versa. To put this clash of codes graphically one can arrange the indices italicized below of *Texts 1* and *2* in a matrix called 'TERRIBLE' (in conformity to the adjectival attribute of units of this class) in such a way as to indicate their mapping into the implied, though unstated terms (given in straight types) of a corresponding matrix 'FINE'.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119

¹⁶ *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. I (Peking, 1967), pp. 26-7.

TERRIBLE	FINE
<i>Insurgents</i>	peasants
<i>fanatic</i>	Islamic puritan
<i>daring and wanton atrocities on the Inhabitants</i> ...	resistance to oppression
<i>defying the authority of the State</i>	revolt against zamindari
<i>disturbing the public tranquil(l)ity</i>	struggle for a better order
<i>intention to attack, etc</i>	intention to punish oppressors
<i>one of their Gods to reign as a King</i>	Santal self-rule

What comes out of the interplay of these mutually implied but opposed matrices is that our texts are not the record of observations uncontaminated by bias, judgement and opinion. On the contrary, they speak of a total complicity. For if the expressions in the right-hand column taken together may be said to stand for insurgency, the code which contains all signifiers of the subaltern practice of ‘turning things upside down’ and the consciousness that informs it, then the other column must stand for its opposite, that is, counter-insurgency. The antagonism between the two is irreducible and there is nothing in this to leave room for neutrality. Hence these documents make no sense except in terms of a code of pacification which, under the Raj, was a complex of coercive intervention by the State and its protégés, the native elite, with arms and words. Representatives of the primary type of discourse in the historiography of peasant revolts, these are specimens of the prose of counter-insurgency.

VI

How far does secondary discourse too share such commitment? Is it possible for it to speak any other prose than that of a counter-insurgency? Those narratives of this category in which their authors figure among the protagonists are of course suspect almost by definition, and the presence of the grammatical first person in these must be acknowledged as a sign of complicity. The question however is whether the loss of objectivity on this account is adequately made up by the consistent use of the aorist in such writings. For as Benveniste observes, the historical utterance admits of three variations of the past tense—that is, the aorist, the imperfect and the pluperfect, and of course the present is altogether excluded.¹⁷ This condition is

¹⁷ Benveniste, op. cit., p. 239.

indeed satisfied by reminiscences separated by a long enough hiatus from the events concerned. What has to be found out therefore is the extent to which the force of the preterite corrects the bias caused by the absence of the third person.

Mark Thornhill's memoirs of the Mutiny provide us with a text in which the author looks back at a series of events he had experienced twenty-seven years ago. 'The events of that time' had 'turned into history', and he intends, as he says in the extract quoted above, to make a contribution 'to that history', and thus produce what we have defined as a particular kind of secondary discourse. The difference inscribed in it by that interval is perhaps best grasped by comparing it with some samples of primary discourse we have on the same subject from the same author. Two of these¹⁸ may be read together as a record of his perception of what happened at the Mathura sadar station and the surrounding countryside between 14 May and 3 June 1857. Written by him donning the district magistrate's topee and addressed to his superiors—one on 5 June 1857, that is, within forty-eight hours of the terminal date of the period under discussion, and the other on 10 August 1858 when the events were still within vivid recall as a very recent past—these letters coincide in scope with that of the narrative covering the same three weeks in the first ninety pages of his book written nearly three decades later donning the historian's hat.

The letters are both predominantly metonymic in character. Originating as they did almost from within the related experience itself they are necessarily foreshortened and tell the reader in breathless sequences about some of the happenings of that extraordinary summer. The syntagm thus takes on a semblance of factuality with hardly any room in it for comment. Yet here again the welding of the functional units can be seen, on close inspection, to be less solid than at first sight. Embedded in them there are indices revealing the anxieties of the local custodian of law and order ('the state of the district generally is such as to *defy all control*'; 'the *law* is at a *standstill*'), his fears ('*very alarming* rumours of the approach of the rebel army'), his moral disapprobation of the activities of the armed villagers ('the disturbances in the district . . . increasing . . . in . . . *enormity*'), his appreciation by contrast of the native collaborators hostile to the

¹⁸ *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh*, vol. V, pp. 685-92.

insurgents (. . . 'the Seths' house . . . *received us most kindly*'). Indices such as these are ideological birth-marks displayed prominently on much of this type of material relating to peasant revolts. Indeed, taken together with some other relevant textual features—e.g. the abrupt mode of address in these documents so revealing of the shock and terror generated by the *émeute*—they accuse all such allegedly 'objective' evidence on the militancy of the rural masses to have been tainted at its source by the prejudice and partisan outlook of their enemies. If historians fail to take notice of these tell-tale signs branded on the staple of their trade, that is a fact which must be explained in terms of the optics of a colonialist historiography rather than construed in favour of the presumed objectivity of their 'primary sources'.

There is nothing immediate or abrupt about the corresponding secondary discourse. On the contrary it has various perspectives built into it to give it a depth in time and following from this temporal determination, its meaning. Compare for instance the narration of events in the two versions for any particular day—for, say, 14 May 1857 at the very beginning of our three-week period. Written up in a very short paragraph of fifty-seven words in Thornhill's letter of 10 August 1858 this can be represented fully in four pithy segments without any significant loss of message: *mutineers approaching; information received from Gurgaon; confirmed by Europeans north of the district; women and non-combattants sent off to Agra*. Since the account starts, for all practical purposes, with this entry, there are no exordia to serve as its context, giving this instant take-off the sense, as we have noticed, of a total surprise. In the book however that same instant is provided with a background spread over four and a half months and three pages (pp. 1-3). All of this time and space is devoted to some carefully chosen details of the author's life and experience in the period preceding the Mutiny. These are truly *significant*. As indices they prepare the reader for what is to come and help him to *understand* the happenings of 14 May and after, when these enter into the narrative at staggered stages. Thus the mysterious circulation of chapatis in January and the silent but expressive concern on the narrator's brother, a high official, over a telegram received at Agra on 12 May conveying the still unconfirmed news of the Meerut uprising, portend the developments two days later at his own district headquarters. Again the trivia about his 'large income and great authority', his house, horses, servants, 'a chest full of silver plate,

which stood in the hall and . . . a great store of Cashmere shawls, pearls, and diamonds' all help to index, by contrast, the holocaust which was soon to reduce his authority to nothing, and turn his servants into rebels, his house into a shambles, his property into booty for the plundering poor of town and country. By anticipating the narrated events thus, if only by implication, secondary discourse destroys the entropy of the first, its raw material. Henceforth there will be nothing in the story that can be said to be altogether unexpected.

This effect is the work of the so-called 'organization shifters'¹⁹ which help the author to superimpose a temporality of his own on that of his theme, that is 'to "dechronologize" the historical thread and restore, if only by way of reminiscence or nostalgia, a Time at once complex, parametric, and non-linear . . . braiding the chronology of the subject-matter with that of the language-act which reports it'. In the present instance the 'braiding' consists not only in fitting an evocative context to the bare sequence related in that short paragraph of his letter. The shifters disrupt the syntagm twice to insert in the breach, on both occasions, a moment of authorial time suspended between the two poles of 'waiting', a figure ideally constituted to allow the play of digressions, asides and parentheses forming loops and zigzags in a story-line and adding thereby to its depth. Thus, waiting for news about the movements of the mutineers he reflects on the peace of the early evening at the sadar station and strays from his account to tell us in violation of the historiographical canon of tense and person: 'The scene was simple and full of the repose of Eastern life. In the times that followed it often recurred to my memory.' And, again, waiting later on for transport to take away the evacuees gathered in his drawing room, he withdraws from that particular night for the duration of a few words to comment: 'It was a beautiful room, brightly lighted, gay with flowers. It was the last time I thus saw it, and so it remains impressed on my memory.'

How far does the operation of these shifters help to correct the bias resulting from the writer's intervention in the first person? Not much by this showing. For each of the indices wedged into the narrative represents a principled choice between the terms of a paradigmatic

¹⁹ For Roman Jakobson's exposition of this key concept, see his *Selected Writings*, 2: *Word and Language* (The Hague and Paris, 1971), pp. 130-47. Barthes develops the notion of organization shifters in his essay 'Historical Discourse', pp. 146-8. All extracts quoted in this paragraph are taken from that essay unless otherwise mentioned.

opposition. Between the authority of the head of the district and its defiance by the armed masses, between the habitual servility of his menials and their assertion of self-respect as rebels, between the insignia of his wealth and power (e.g. gold, horses, shawls, bungalow) and their appropriation or destruction by the subaltern crowds, the author, hardly differentiated from the administrator that he was twenty-seven years ago, consistently chooses the former. Nostalgia makes the choice all the more eloquent—a recall of what is thought to be ‘fine’ such as a peaceful evening or an elegant room emphasizing by contrast the ‘terrible’ aspects of popular violence directed against the Raj. Quite clearly there is a logic to this preference. It affirms itself by negating a series of inversions which, combined with other signs of the same order, constitute a code of insurgency. The pattern of the historian’s choice, identical with the magistrate’s, conforms thus to a counter-code, the code of counter-insurgency.

VII

If the neutralizing effect of the aorist fails thus to prevail over the subjectivity of the protagonist as narrator in this particular genre of secondary discourse, how does the balance of tense and person stand in the other kind of writing within the same category? One can see two distinct idioms at work here, both identified with the standpoint of colonialism but unlike each other in expressing it. The cruder variety is well exemplified in *The Chuar Rebellion of 1799* by J. C. Price. Written long after the event, in 1874, it was obviously meant by the author, Settlement Officer of Midnapur at the time, to serve as a straightforward historical account with no particular administrative end in view. He addressed it to ‘the casual reader’ as well as to any ‘future Collector of Midnapore’, hoping to share with both ‘that keen interest which I have felt as I have read the old Midnapore records’.²⁰ But the author’s ‘delight . . . experienced in pouring over these papers’ seems to have produced a text almost indistinguishable from the primary discourse used as its source. The latter is, for one thing, conspicuous by its sheer physical presence. Over a fifth of that half of the book which deals specifically with the events of 1799 is made up of direct quotations from those records and another large part of barely modified extracts. More important for us, however, is the evidence we have of the author’s identification of his own senti-

²⁰ Price, op. cit., p. *clx*.

ments with those of that small group of whites who were reaping the whirlwind produced by the wind of a violently disruptive change the Company's Government had sown in the south-western corner of Bengal. Only the fear of the beleaguered officials at Midnapur station in 1799 turns seventy-five years later into that genocidal hatred characteristic of a genre of post-Mutiny British writing. 'The disinclination of the authorities, civil or military, to proceed in person to help to quell the disturbances is most striking', he writes shaming his compatriots and then goes on to brag:

In these days of breech-loaders half a dozen Europeans would have been a match for twenty times their number of Chuars. Of course with the imperfect nature of the weapons of that day it could not be expected that Europeans would fruitlessly rush into danger, but I should have expected that the European officers of the station would have in some instances at least courted and met an attack in person and repulsed their assailants. I wonder that no one European officer, civilian or military, with the exception of perhaps Lieutenant Gill, owned to that sensation of joyous excitement most young men feel now-a-days in field sports, or in any pursuit where there is an element of danger. I think most of us, had we lived in 1799, would have counted it better sport had we bagged a marauding Chuar reeking with blood and spoils, than the largest bear that the Midnapore jungles can produce.²¹

Quite clearly the author's separation from his subject-matter and the difference between the time of the event and that of its narration here have done little to inspire objectivity in him. His passion is apparently of the same order as that of the British soldier who wrote on the eve of the sack of Delhi in 1857: 'I most sincerely trust that the order given when we attack Delhi will be. . . "Kill every one; no quarter is to be given"'.²² The historian's attitude to rebels is in this instance indistinguishable from that of the State—the attitude of the hunter to his quarry. Regarded thus an insurgent is not a subject of understanding or interpretation but of extermination, and the discourse of history, far from being neutral, serves directly to instigate official violence.

There were however other writers working within the same genre who are known to have expressed themselves in a less

²¹ Ibid.

²² Reginald G. Wilberforce, *An Unrecorded Chapter of the Indian Mutiny* (2nd edition; London, 1894), pp. 76-7.

sanguinary idiom. They are perhaps best represented by W. W. Hunter and his account of the Santal insurrection of 1855 in *The Annals of Rural Bengal*. It is, in many respects, a remarkable text. Written within a decade of the Mutiny and twelve years of the *hool*,²³ it has none of that revanchist and racist overtone common to a good deal of Anglo-Indian literature of the period. Indeed the author treats the enemies of the Raj not only with consideration but with respect although they had wiped it off from three eastern districts in a matter of weeks and held out for five months against the combined power of the colonial army and its newly acquired auxiliaries—railways and the ‘electric telegraph’. One of the first modern exercises in the historiography of Indian peasant revolts, it situates the uprising in a cultural and socio-economic context, analyses its causes, and draws on local records and contemporary accounts for evidence about its progress and eventual suppression. Here, to all appearances, we have that classic instance of the author’s own bias and opinion dissolving under the operation of the past tense and the grammatical third person. Here, perhaps, historical discourse has come to its own and realized that ideal of an ‘apersonal . . . mode of narrative . . . designed to wipe out the presence of the speaker’?²⁴

This semblance of objectivity, of the want of any obviously demonstrable bias, has however nothing to do with ‘facts speaking for themselves’ in a state of pure metonymy unsullied by comment. On the contrary the text is packed with comment. One has to compare it with something like the near contemporary article on this subject in *Calcutta Review* (1856) or even K. K. Datta’s history of the *hool* written long after its suppression to realize how little there is in it of the details of what actually happened.²⁵ Indeed the narration of the event occupies in the book only about 7 per cent of the chapter which builds up climactically towards it, and somewhat less than 50 per cent of the print devoted specifically to this topic within that chapter. The syntagm is broken up again and again by dystaxia and interpretation

²³ It appears from a note in this work that parts of it were written in 1866. The dedication bears the date 4 March 1868. All our references to this work in quotation or otherwise are to Chapter IV of the seventh edition (London, 1897) unless otherwise stated.

²⁴ Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, p. 112.

²⁵ Anon., ‘The Sonthal Rebellion’, *Calcutta Review* (1856), pp. 223-64; K. K. Datta, ‘The Santal Insurrection of 1855-57’, in *Anti-British Plots and Movements before 1857* (Meerut, 1970), pp. 43-152.

filters through to assemble the segments into a meaningful whole of a primarily metaphorical character. The consequence of this operation that is most relevant for our purpose here is the way in which it distributes the paradigmatic relata along an axis of historical continuity between a 'before' and an 'after', forelengthening it with a context and extending it into a perspective. The representation of insurgency ends up thus by having its moment intercalated between its past and future so that the particular values of one and the other are rubbed into the event to give it the meaning specific to it.

VIII

To turn first to the context, two-thirds of the chapter which culminates in the history of the insurrection is taken up with an inaugural account of what may be called the natural history of its protagonists. An essay in ethnography this deals with the physical traits, language, traditions, myths, religion, rituals, habitat, environment, hunting and agricultural practices, social organization and communal government of the Santals of the Birbhum region. There are many details here which index the coming conflict as one of contraries, as between the noble savage of the hills and mean exploiters from the plains—references to his personal dignity ('He does not abase himself to the ground like the rural Hindu'; the Santal woman is 'ignorant of the shrinking squeamishness of the Hindu female', etc.) implying the contrast his would-be reduction to servitude by Hindu moneylenders, his honesty ('Unlike the Hindu, he never thinks of making money by a stranger, scrupulously avoids all topics of business, and feels pained if payment is pressed upon him for the milk and fruit which his wife brings out'), the greed and fraud of the alien traders and landlords leading eventually to the insurrection, his aloofness ('The Santals live as much apart as possible from the Hindus'), the *diku's* intrusion into his life and territory and the holocaust which inevitably followed.

These indices give the uprising not only a moral dimension and the values of a just war, but also a depth in time. The latter is realized by the operation of diachronic markers in the text—an imaginary past by creation myths (appropriate for an enterprise taken up on the Thakur's advice) and a real but remote past (befitting a revolt steeped in tradition) by the sherds of prehistory in ritual and speech with the Santals' ceremony of 'Purifying for the Dead' mentioned, for instance, as the trace of 'a faint remembrance of the far-off time when they

dwelt beside great rivers' and their language as 'that intangible record on which a nation's past is graven more deeply than on brass tablets or rock inscriptions'.

Moving closer to the event the author provides it with a recent past covering roughly a period of sixty years of 'direct administration' in the area. The moral and temporal aspects of the narrative merge here in the figure of an irreconcilable contradiction. On the one hand there were, according to Hunter, a series of beneficial measures introduced by the government—the Decennial Settlement helping to expand the area under cultivation and induce the Santals, since 1792, to hire themselves out as agricultural labourers; the setting up, in 1832, of an enclosure ringed off by masonry pillars where they could colonize virgin land and jungle without fear of harassment from hostile tribes; the development of 'English enterprise' in Bengal in the form of indigo factories for which 'the Santal immigrants afforded a population of day-labourers'; and last but not the least of bonanzas, their absorption by thousands into labour gangs for the construction of railways across that region in 1854. But there were, on the other hand, two sets of factors which combined to undo all the good resulting from colonial rule, namely, the exploitation and oppression of the Santals by greedy and fraudulent Hindu landlords, money-lenders and traders, and the failure of the local administration, its police and the courts to protect them or redress the wrongs they suffered.

IX

This emphasis on contradiction serves an obviously interpretative purpose for the author. It makes it possible for him to locate the cause of the uprising in a failure of the Raj to make its ameliorative aspects prevail over the still lingering defects and shortcomings in its exercise of authority. The account of the event therefore fits directly into the objective stated at the beginning of the chapter, that is, to interest not only the scholar 'in these lapsed races' but the statesman as well. 'The Indian statesman will discover', he had written there referring euphemistically to the makers of British policy in India, 'that these Children of the Forest are . . . amenable to the same reclaiming influences as other men, and that upon their capacity for civilisation the future extension of English enterprise in Bengal in a large measure depends'. It is this concern for 'reclamation' (shorthand for

accelerating the transformation of the tribal peasantry into wage labour and harnessing them to characteristically colonialist projects for the exploitation of Indian resources) which explains the mixture of firmness and 'understanding' in Hunter's attitude to the rebellion. A liberal-imperialist he regarded it both as a menace to the stability of the Raj and as a useful critique of its far from perfect administration. So while he censured the government of the day for not declaring Martial Law soon enough in order to cut down the *hool* at its inception, he was careful to differentiate himself from those of his compatriots who wanted to punish the entire Santal community for the crime of its rebels and deport overseas the population of the districts involved. A genuinely far-sighted imperialist he looked forward to the day when the tribe, like many other aboriginal peoples of the subcontinent, would demonstrate its 'capacity for civilisation' by acting as an inexhaustible source of cheap labour power.

This vision is inscribed into the perspective with which the narration ends. Blaming the outbreak of the *hool* squarely on that 'cheap and practical administration' which paid no heed to the Santals' complaints and concentrated on tax collection alone it goes on to catalogue the somewhat illusory benefits of 'the more exact system that was introduced after the revolt' to keep the power of the usurers over debtors within the limits of the law, check the use of false weights and measures in retail trade, and ensure the right of bonded labourers to choose freedom by desertion or change of employers. But more than administrative reform it was 'English enterprise' again which radically contributed to the welfare of the tribe. The railways 'completely changed the relation of labour to capital' and did away with that 'natural reason for slavery—to wit, the absence of a wage-fund for free workmen'. The demand for plantation labour in the Assam tea-districts 'was destined still further to improve the position of the Santals' and so was the stimulus for indenturing coolies for the Mauritius and the Carribeans. It was thus that the tribal peasant prospered thanks to the development of a vast sub-continental and overseas labour market within the British Empire. In the Assam tea gardens 'his whole family gets employment, and every additional child, instead of being the means of increasing his poverty, becomes a source of wealth', while the coolies returned from Africa or the West Indies 'at the expiry of their contracts with savings averaging £20 sterling, a sum sufficient to set up a Santal as a considerable proprietor in his own village'.

Many of these so-called improvements were, as we know now looking back at them across a century, the result of sheer wishful thinking or so ephemeral as not to have mattered at all. The connection between usury and bonded labour continued all through British rule well into independent India. The freedom of the labour market was seriously restricted by the want of competition between British and indigenous capital. The employment of tribal families on tea plantations became a source of cynical exploitation of the labour of women and children. The advantages of mobility and contractuality were cancelled out by irregularities in the process of recruitment and the manipulation of the contrary factors of economic dependence and social differentiation by *arkatis*. The system of indenturing helped rather less to liberate servile labour than to develop a sort of second serfdom, and so on.

Yet this vision which never materialized offers an insight into the character of this type of discourse. The perspective it inspired amounted in effect to a testament of faith in colonialism. The *hool* was assimilated there to the career of the Raj and the militant enterprise of a tribal peasantry to free themselves from the triple yoke of *sarkari*, *sahukari* and *zamindari* to 'English enterprise'—the infrastructure of Empire. Hence the objective stated at the beginning of the account could be reiterated towards the end with the author saying that he had written at least 'partly for the instruction which their [the Santals'] recent history furnishes as to the proper method of dealing with the aboriginal races'. The suppression of local peasant revolts was a part of this method, but it was incorporated now in a broader strategy designed to tackle the economic problems of the British Government in India as an element of the global problems of imperial politics. 'These are the problems', says Hunter in concluding the chapter, 'which Indian statesmen during the next fifty years will be called upon to solve. Their predecessors have given civilisation to India; it will be their duty to render that civilisation at once beneficial to the natives and safe for ourselves.' In other words this historiography was assigned a role in a political process that would ensure the security of the Raj by a combination of force to crush rebellion when it occurred and reform to pre-empt it by wrenching the tribal peasantry out of their rural bases and distributing them as cheap labour power for British capital to exploit in India and abroad. The overtly aggressive and nervous prose of counter-insurgency born of

the worries of the early colonial days came thus to adopt in this genre of historical writing the firm but benign, authoritarian but understanding idiom of a mature and self-assured imperialism.

X

How is it that even the more liberal type of secondary discourse is unable thus to extricate itself from the code of counter-insurgency? With all the advantage he has of writing in the third person and addressing a distinct past the official turned historian is still far from being impartial where official interests are concerned. His sympathies for the peasants' sufferings and his understanding of what goaded them to revolt, do not, when the crunch comes, prevent him from siding with law and order and justifying the transfer of the campaign against the *hool* from civilian to military hands in order to crush it completely and quickly. And as discussed above, his partisanship over the outcome of the rebellion is matched by his commitment to the aims and interests of the regime. The discourse of history, hardly distinguished from policy, ends up by absorbing the concerns and objectives of the latter.

In this affinity with policy historiography reveals its character as a form of *colonialist knowledge*. That is, it derives directly from that knowledge which the bourgeoisie had used in the period of their ascendancy to interpret the world in order to master it and establish their hegemony over Western societies, but turned into an instrument of national oppression as they began to acquire for themselves 'a place in the sun'. It was thus that political science which had defined the ideal of citizenship for European nation-states was used in colonial India to set up institutions and frame laws designed specifically to generate a mitigated and second-class citizenship. Political economy which had developed in Europe as a critique of feudalism was made to promote a neo-feudal landlordism in India. Historiography too adapted itself to the relations of power under the Raj and was harnessed more and more to the service of the state.

It was thanks to this connection and a good deal of talent to back it up that historical writing on themes of the colonial period shaped up as a highly coded discourse. Operating within the framework of a many-sided affirmation of British rule in the subcontinent it assumed the function of representing the recent past of its people as 'England's Work in India'. A discourse of power in its own right it had each of its

moments displayed as a triumph, that is, as the most favourable upshot of a number of conflicting possibilities for the regime at any particular time. In its mature form, therefore, as in Hunter's *Annals*, continuity figures as one of its necessary and cardinal aspects. Unlike primary discourse it cannot afford to be foreshortened and without a sequel. The event does not constitute its sole content, but is the middle term between a beginning which serves as a context and an end which is at the same time a perspective linked to the next sequence. The only element that is constant in this ongoing series is the Empire and the policies needed to safeguard and perpetuate it.

Functioning as he does within this code Hunter with all the goodwill so solemnly announced in his dedicatory note ('These pages... have little to say touching the governing race. My business is with the people') writes up the history of a popular struggle as one in which the real subject is not the people but, indeed, 'the governing race' institutionalized as the Raj. Like any other narrative of this kind his account of the *hool* too is there to celebrate a continuity—that of British power in India. The statement of causes and reforms is no more than a structural requirement for this continuum providing it respectively with context and perspective. These serve admirably to register the event as a datum in the life-story of the Empire, but do nothing to illuminate that consciousness which is called insurgency. The rebel has no place in this history as the subject of rebellion.

XI

There is nothing in tertiary discourse to make up for this absence. Farthest removed in time from the events which it has for its theme it always looks at them in the third person. It is the work of non-official writers in most cases or of former officials no longer under any professional obligation or constraint to represent the standpoint of the government. If it happens to carry an official view at all this is only because the author has chosen it of his own will rather than because he has been conditioned to do so by any loyalty or allegiance based on administrative involvement. There are indeed some historical works which actually show such a preference and are unable to speak in a voice other than that of the custodians of law and order—an instance of tertiary discourse reverting to that state of crude identification with the regime so characteristic of primary discourse.

But there are other and very different idioms within this genre

ranging from liberal to left. The latter is particularly important as perhaps the most influential and prolific of all the many varieties of tertiary discourse. We owe to it some of the best studies on Indian peasant insurgency and more and more of these are coming out all the time as evidence both of a growing academic interest in the subject and the relevance that the subaltern movements of the past have to contemporary tensions in our part of the world. This literature is distinguished by its effort to break away from the code of counter-insurgency. It adopts the insurgent's point of view and regards, with him, as 'fine' what the other side calls 'terrible', and vice versa. It leaves the reader in no doubt that it wants the rebels and not their enemies to win. Here unlike in secondary discourse of the liberal-imperialist type recognition of the wrongs done to the peasants leads directly to support for their struggle to seek redress by arms.

Yet these two types, so very different from and contrary to each other in ideological orientation, have much else that is common between them. Take for instance that remarkable contribution of radical scholarship, Suprakash Ray's *Bharater Krishak-bidroha O Ganatantrik Samgram*²⁶ and compare its account of the Santal uprising of 1855 with Hunter's. The texts echo each other as narratives. Ray's being the later work has all the advantage of drawing on more recent research such as Datta's, and thus being more informed. But much of what it has to say about the inauguration and development of the *hool* is taken—in fact, quoted directly—from Hunter's *Annals*.²⁷ And both the authors rely on the *Calcutta Review* (1856) article for much of their evidence. There is thus little in the description of this particular event which differs significantly between the secondary and the tertiary types of discourse.

Nor is there much to distinguish between the two in terms of their admiration for the courage of the rebels and their abhorrence of the genocidal operations mounted by the counter-insurgency forces. In fact, on both these points Ray reproduces *in extenso* Hunter's testimony, gathered first-hand from officers directly involved in the campaign, that the Santals 'did not understand yielding', while for the army, 'it was not war . . . it was execution'.²⁸ The sympathy expressed for the enemies of the Raj in the radical tertiary discourse is

²⁶ Vol.I (Calcutta, 1966), Ch.13.

²⁷ For these see *ibid.*, pp. 323, 325, 327, 328.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 337; Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-9.

matched fully by that in the colonialist secondary discourse. Indeed, for both, the *hool* was an eminently just struggle—an evaluation derived from their mutual concurrence about the factors which had provoked it. Wicked landlords, extortionate usurers, dishonest traders, venal police, irresponsible officials and partisan processes of law—all figure with equal prominence in both the accounts. Both the historians draw on the evidence recorded on this subject in the *Calcutta Review* essay, and for much of his information about Santal indebtedness and bond slavery, about moneylenders' and landlords' oppression and administrative connivance at all this Ray relies heavily again on Hunter, as witness the extracts quoted liberally from the latter's work.²⁹

However, causality is used by the two writers to develop entirely different perspectives. The statement of causes has the same part to play in Hunter's account as in any other narrative of the secondary type—that is, as an essential aspect of the discourse of counter-insurgency. In this respect his *Annals* belongs to a tradition of colonialist historiography which, for this particular event, is typically exemplified by that racist and vindictive essay, 'The Sonthal Rebellion'. There the obviously knowledgeable but tough-minded official ascribes the uprising, as Hunter does, to banias' fraud, mahajani transaction, zamindari despotism and sarkari inefficiency. In much the same vein Thornhill's *Personal Adventures* accounts for the rural uprisings of the period of the Mutiny in Uttar Pradesh quite clearly by the breakdown in traditional agrarian relations consequent on the advent of British rule. O'Malley identifies the root of the Pabna *bidroha* of 1873 in rack-renting by landlords, and the Deccan Riots Commission that of the disturbances of 1875 in the exploitation of the Kunbi peasantry by alien moneylenders in Poona and Ahmednagar districts.³⁰ One could go on adding many other events and texts to this list. The spirit of all these is well represented in the following extract from the *Judicial Department Resolutions* of 22 November 1831 on the subject of the insurrection led by Titu Mir:

²⁹ Ray, *op. cit.*, pp. 316-19.

³⁰ Anon., *op. cit.*, pp. 238-41; Thornhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-5; L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Pabna* (Calcutta, 1923), p. 25; *Report of the Commission Appointed in India to Inquire into the Causes of the Riots which took place in the year 1875 in the Poona and Ahmednagar Districts of the Bombay Presidency* (London, 1878), *passim*.

The serious nature of the late disturbances in the district of Baraset renders it an object of paramount importance that the *cause* which gave rise to them should be fully *investigated* in order that the motives which activated the insurgents may be rightly *understood* and such measures adopted as may be deemed expedient *to prevent a recurrence of similar disorders*.³¹

That sums it up. To know the cause of a phenomenon is already a step taken in the direction of controlling it. To *investigate* and thereby *understand* the cause of rural disturbances is an aid to measures 'deemed expedient *to prevent a recurrence of similar disorders*'. To that end the correspondent of the *Calcutta Review* (1856) recommended 'that condign retribution', namely, 'that they [the Santals] should be surrounded and hunted up everywhere . . . that they should be compelled, by force, if need be, to return to the Damin-i-koh, and to the wasted country in Bhaugulpore and Beerbhoom, to rebuild the ruined villages, restore the desolate fields to cultivation, open roads, and advance general public works; and do this under watch and guard . . . and that this state of things should be continued, until they are completely tranquillized, and reconciled to their allegiance'.³² The gentler alternative put forward by Hunter was, as we have seen, a combination of Martial Law to suppress an ongoing revolt and measures to follow it up by 'English enterprise' in order (as his compatriot had suggested) to absorb the unruly peasantry as a cheap labour force in agriculture and public works for the benefit respectively of the same *dikus* and railway and roadwork engineers against whom they had taken up arms. With all their variation in tone, however, both the prescriptions to 'make . . . rebellion impossible by the elevation of the Sonthals'³³—indeed, all colonialist solutions arrived at by the casual explanation of our peasant uprisings—were grist to a historiography committed to assimilating them to the transcendental Destiny of the British Empire.

XII

Causality serves to hitch the *hool* to a rather different kind of Destiny in Ray's account. But the latter goes through the same steps as Hunter's—that is, *context-event-perspective* ranged along a historical continuum—to arrive there. There are some obvious parallelisms in

³¹ BC 54222: *JC*, 22 Nov. 1831 (no.91). Emphasis added.

³² Anon., *op. cit.*, pp. 263-4.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

the way the event acquires a context in the two works. Both start off with prehistory (treated more briefly by Ray than Hunter) and follow it up with a survey of the more recent past since 1790 when the tribe first came into contact with the regime. It is there that the cause of the insurrection lies for both—but with a difference. For Hunter the disturbances originated in a local malignance in an otherwise healthy body—the failure of a district administration to act up to the then emerging ideal of the Raj as the *ma-baap* of the peasantry and protect them from the tyranny of wicked elements within the native society itself. For Ray it was the very presence of British power in India which had goaded the Santals to revolt, for their enemies the landlords and moneylenders owed their authority and indeed their existence to the new arrangements in landed property introduced by the colonial government and the accelerated development of a money economy under its impact. The rising constituted, therefore, a critique not only of a local administration but of colonialism itself. Indeed he uses Hunter's own evidence to arrive at that very different, indeed contrary, conclusion:

It is clearly proved by Hunter's own statement that the responsibility for the extreme misery of the Santals lies with the English administrative system taken as a whole together with the zamindars and mahajans. For it was the English administrative system which had created zamindars and mahajans in order to satisfy its own need for exploitation and government, and helped them directly and indirectly by offering its protection and patronage.³⁴

With colonialism, that is, the Raj as a system and in its entirety (rather than any of its local malfunctions) identified thus as the prime cause of rebellion, its outcome acquires radically different values in the two texts. While Hunter is explicit in his preference of a victory in favour of the regime, Ray is equally so in favour of the rebels. And corresponding to this each has a perspective which stands out in sharp contrast to that of the other. It is for Hunter the consolidation of British rule based on a reformed administration which no longer incites jacqueries by its failure to protect *adivasis* from native exploiters, but transforms them into an abundant and mobile labour force readily and profitably employed by Indian landlords and 'English enterprise'. For Ray the event is 'the precursor of the great

³⁴ Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

rebellion' of 1857 and a vital link in a protracted struggle of the Indian people in general and peasants and workers in particular against foreign as well as indigenous oppressors. The armed insurrection of the Santals, he says, has indicated a way to the Indian people. "That particular way has, thanks to the great rebellion of 1857, developed into the broad highway of India's struggle for freedom. That highway extends into the twentieth century. The Indian peasantry are on their march along that very highway."³⁵ In fitting the *hool* thus to a perspective of continuing struggle of the rural masses the author draws on a well-established tradition of radical historiography as witness, for instance, the following extract from a pamphlet which had a wide readership in left political circles nearly thirty years ago:

The din of the actual battles of the insurrection has died down. But its echoes have kept on vibrating through the years, growing louder and louder as more peasants joined in the fight. The clarion call that summoned the Santhals to battle . . . was to be heard in other parts of the country at the time of the Indigo Strike of 1860, the Pabna and Bogra Uprising of 1872, the Maratha Peasant Rising in Poona and Ahmednagar in 1875-76. It was finally to merge in the massive demand of the peasantry all over the country for an end to zamindari and moneylending oppression Glory to the immortal Santhals who . . . showed the path to battle! The banner of militant struggle has since then passed from hand to hand over the length and breadth of India.³⁶

The power of such assimilative thinking about the history of peasant insurgency is further illustrated by the concluding words of an essay written by a veteran of the peasant movement and published by the Pashchimbanga Pradeshik Krishak Sabha on the eve of the centenary of the Santal revolt. Thus,

The flames of the fire kindled by the peasant martyrs of the Santal insurrection a hundred years ago had spread to many regions all over India. Those flames could be seen burning in the indigo cultivators' rebellion in Bengal (1860), in the uprising of the raiyats of Pabna and Bogra (1872), in that of the Maratha peasantry of the Deccan (1875-76). The same fire was kindled again and again in the course of the Moplah peasant revolts of Malabar. That fire has not been extinguished yet, it is still burning in the hearts of the Indian peasants . . .³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., p. 340.

³⁶ L. Natarajan, *Peasant Uprisings in India, 1850-1900* (Bombay, 1953), pp. 31-2.

³⁷ Abdulla Rasul, *Saontal Bidroher Amar Kahini* (Calcutta, 1954), p. 24.

The purpose of such tertiary discourse is quite clearly to try and retrieve the history of insurgency from that continuum which is designed to assimilate every jacquerie to 'England's Work in India' and arrange it along the alternative axis of a protracted campaign for freedom and socialism. However, as with colonialist historiography this, too, amounts to an act of appropriation which excludes the rebel as the conscious subject of his own history and incorporates the latter as only a contingent element in another history with another subject. Just as it is not the rebel but the Raj which is the real subject of secondary discourse and the Indian bourgeoisie that of tertiary discourse of the History-of-the-Freedom-Struggle genre, so is an *abstraction* called Worker-and-Peasant, *an ideal rather than the real historical personality of the insurgent*, made to replace him in the type of literature discussed above.

To say this is of course not to deny the political importance of such appropriation. Since every struggle for power by the historically ascendant classes in any epoch involves a bid to acquire a tradition, it is entirely in the fitness of things that the revolutionary movements in India should lay a claim to, among others, the Santal rebellion of 1855 as a part of their heritage. But however noble the cause and instrument of such appropriation, it leads to the mediation of the insurgent's consciousness by the historian's—that is, of a past consciousness by one conditioned by the present. The distortion which follows necessarily and inevitably from this process is a function of that hiatus between event-time and discourse-time which makes the verbal representation of the past less than accurate in the best of cases. And since the discourse is, in this particular instance, one about properties of the mind—about attitudes, beliefs, ideas, etc. rather than about externalities which are easier to identify and describe, the task of representation is made even more complicated than usual.

There is nothing that historiography can do to eliminate such distortion altogether, for the latter is built into its optics. What it can do, however, is to acknowledge such distortion as parametric—as a datum which determines the form of the exercise itself, and to stop pretending that it can *fully* grasp a past consciousness and reconstitute it. Then and only then might the distance between the latter and the historian's perception of it be reduced significantly enough to amount to a close approximation which is the best one could hope for. The gap as it stands at the moment is indeed so wide that there is much

more than an irreducible degree of error in the existing literature on this point. Even a brief look at some of the discourses on the 1855 insurrection should bear this out.

XIII

Religiosity was, by all accounts, central to the *hool*. The notion of power which inspired it, was made up of such ideas and expressed in such words and acts as were explicitly religious in character. It was not that power was a content wrapped up in a form external to it called religion. It was a matter of both being inseparably collapsed as the signified and its signifier (*vāgarthāviva samprktau*) in the language of that massive violence. Hence the attribution of the rising to a divine command rather than to any particular grievance; the enactment of rituals both before (e.g. propitiatory ceremonies to ward off the apocalypse of the Primeval Serpents—Lag and Lagini, the distribution of *tel-sindur*, etc.) and during the uprising (e.g. worshipping the goddess Durga, bathing in the Ganges, etc.); the generation and circulation of myth in its characteristic vehicle—rumour (e.g. about the advent of ‘the exterminating angel’ incarnated as a buffalo, the birth of a prodigious hero to a virgin, etc.).³⁸ The evidence is both unequivocal and ample on this point. The statements we have from the leading protagonists and their followers are all emphatic and indeed insistent on this aspect of their struggle, as should be obvious even from the few extracts of source material reproduced below in the *Appendix*. In sum, it is not possible to speak of insurgency in this case except as a religious consciousness—except, that is, as a massive demonstration of self-estrangement (to borrow Marx’s term for the very essence of religiosity) which made the rebels look upon their project as predicated on a will other than their own: ‘Kanoo and Seedoo Manjee are not fighting. The Thacoor himself will fight.’³⁹

How authentically has this been represented in historical discourse? It was identified in official correspondence at the time as a case of ‘fanaticism’. The insurrection was three months old and still going strong when J. R. Ward, a Special Commissioner and one of the most important administrators in the Birbhum region, wrote in some

³⁸ The instances are far too numerous to cite in an essay of this size, but for some samples see *Mare Hapram Ko Reak Katha*, Ch.79, in A. Mitra (ed.), *District Handbooks: Bankura* (Calcutta, 1953).

³⁹ *Appendix: Extract 2.*

desperation to his superiors in Calcutta, 'I have been unable to trace 'he insurrection in Beerbhoom to any thing but *fanaticism*.' The idiom he used to describe the phenomenon was typical of the shocked and culturally arrogant response of nineteenth-century colonialism to any radical movement inspired by a non-Christian doctrine among a subject population: 'These Sonthals have been led to join in the rebellion under a persuasion which is clearly traceable to their brethren in Bhaugulpore, that an Almighty & inspired Being appeared as the redeemer of their Caste & their *ignorance & superstition* was easily worked into a *religious frenzy* which has stopped at nothing.'⁴⁰ That idiom occurs also in the *Calcutta Review* article. There the Santal is acknowledged as 'an eminently religious man' and his revolt as a parallel of other historical occasions when '*the fanatical spirit of religious superstition*' had been 'swayed to strengthen and help forward a quarrel already ready to burst and based on other grounds.'⁴¹ However, the author gives this identification a significantly different slant from that in the report quoted above. There an incomprehending Ward, caught in the blast of the *hool*, appears to have been impressed by the spontaneity of 'a religious frenzy which...stopped at nothing'. By contrast the article written after the regime had recovered its self-confidence, thanks to the search-and-burn campaign in the disturbed tracts, interprets religiosity as a propagandist ruse used by the leaders to sustain the morale of the rebels. Referring, for instance, to the messianic rumours in circulation it says, 'All these absurdities were no doubt *devised* to keep up the courage of the numerous rabble.'⁴² Nothing could be more elitist. The insurgents are regarded here as a mindless 'rabble' devoid of a will of their own and easily manipulated by their chiefs.

But elitism such as this is not a feature of colonialist historiography alone. Tertiary discourse of the radical variety, too, exhibits the same disdain for the political consciousness of the peasant masses when it is mediated by religiosity. For a sample let us turn to Ray's account of the rising again. He quotes the following lines from the *Calcutta Review* article in a somewhat inaccurate but still clearly recognizable translation:

Seedoo and Kanoo were at night seated in their home, revolving many things . . . a bit of paper fell on Seedoo's head, and suddenly the Thakoor

⁴⁰ *JP*, 8 Nov. 1855: Ward to Government of Bengal (13 Oct. 1855). Emphasis added.

⁴¹ Anon., *op. cit.*, p. 243. Emphasis added.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 246. Emphasis added.

(god) appeared before the astonished gaze of Seedoo and Kanoo; he was like a white man though dressed in the native style; on each hand he had ten fingers; he held a white book, and wrote therein; the book and with it 20 pieces of paper . . . he presented to the brothers; ascended upwards, and disappeared. Another bit of paper fell on Seedoo's head,⁴³ and then came two men . . . hinted to them the purport of Thakoor's order, and they likewise vanished. But there was not merely one apparition of the sublime Thakoor; each day in the week for some short period, did he make known his presence to his favourite apostles . . . In the silvery pages of the book, and upon the white leaves of the single scraps of paper, were words written; these were afterwards deciphered by literate Sonthals, able to read and interpret; but their meaning had already been sufficiently indicated to the two leaders.⁴³

With some minor changes of detail (inevitable in a living folklore) this is indeed a fairly authentic account of the visions the two Santal leaders believed they had had. Their statements, reproduced in part in the *Appendix* (Extracts 3 and 4), bear this out. These, incidentally, were not public pronouncements meant to impress their followers. Unlike 'The Thacoor's Perwannah' (*Appendix*: Extract 2) intended to make their views known to the authorities before the uprising, these were the words of captives facing execution. Addressed to hostile interrogators in military encampments they could have little use as propaganda. Uttered by men of a tribe which, according to all accounts had not yet learnt to lie,⁴⁴ these represented the truth and nothing but the truth for their speakers. But that is not what Ray would credit them with. What figures as a mere insinuation in the *Calcutta Review* is raised to the status of an elaborate propaganda device in his introductory remarks on the passage cited above. Thus:

Both Sidu and Kanu knew that the slogan (*dhwani*) which would have the most effect among the *backward* Santals, was one that was religious. Therefore, *in order to inspire* the Santals to struggle they *spread* the word about God's directive in favour of launching such a struggle. The story *invented* (*kalpita*) by them is as follows.⁴⁵

There is little that is different here from what the colonialist writer had to say about the presumed backwardness of the Santal peasantry,

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 243-4. Ray, *op. cit.*, pp. 321-2.

⁴⁴ This is generally accepted. See, for instance, Sherwill's observation about the truth being 'sacred' to the Santals 'offering in this respect a bright example to their lying neighbours, the Bengalis'. *Geographical and Statistical Report of the District Bhaugulpur* (Calcutta, 1854), p. 32.

⁴⁵ Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 321. Emphasis added.

the manipulative designs of their leaders and the uses of religion as the means of such manipulation. Indeed, on each of these points Ray does better and is by far the more explicit of the two authors in attributing a gross lie and downright deception to the rebel chiefs without any evidence at all. The invention is all his own and testifies to the failure of a shallow radicalism to conceptualize insurgent mentality except in terms of an unadulterated secularism. Unable to grasp religiosity as the central modality of peasant consciousness in colonial India he is shy to acknowledge its mediation of the peasant's idea of power and all the resultant contradictions. He is obliged therefore to rationalize the ambiguities of rebel politics by assigning a worldly consciousness to the leaders and an otherworldly one to their followers making of the latter innocent dupes of crafty men armed with all the tricks of a modern Indian politician out to solicit rural votes. Where this lands the historian can be seen even more clearly in the projection of this thesis to a study of the Birsaites *ulgulan* in Ray's subsequent work. He writes,

In order to propagate this religious doctrine of his Birsa adopted *a new device (kaushal)*—just as Sidu, the Santal leader, had done on the eve of the Santal rebellion of 1885. Birsa knew that the Kol were a *very backward* people and were full of *religious superstition* as a result of Hindu-Brahmanical and Christian missionary propaganda amongst them over a long period. Therefore, it would not do to avoid the question of religion if the Kol people were to be liberated from those wicked religious influences and drawn into the path of rebellion. Rather, in order to overcome the evil influences of Hindu and Christian religions, it would be necessary to spread his new religious faith among them in the name of that very God of theirs, and to introduce new rules. *To this end, recourse had to be had to falsehood, if necessary, in the interests of the people.*

Birsa *spread* the word that he had received this new religion of his from the chief deity of the Mundas, Sing Bonga, himself.⁴⁶

Thus the radical historian is driven by the logic of his own incomprehension to attribute a deliberate falsehood to one of the greatest of our rebels. The ideology of that mighty *ulgulan* is nothing but pure fabrication for him. And he is not alone in his

⁴⁶ Ray, *Bharater Baiprabik Samgramer Itihās*, vol. I' (Calcutta, 1970), p. 95. Emphasis added. The sentence italicized by us in the quoted passage reads as follows in the Bengali original: 'Eijanyo prayojan hoiley jatir svarthey mithyar asroy grahan karitey hoibey'.

misreading of insurgent consciousness. Baskay echoes him almost word for word in describing the Santal leader's claim to divine support for the *hool* as propaganda meant 'to inspire the Santals to rise in revolt'.⁴⁷ Formulations such as these have their foil in other writings of the same genre which solve the riddle of religious thinking among the Santal rebels by ignoring it altogether. A reader who has Natarajan's and Rasul's once influential essays as his only source of information about the insurrection of 1855, would hardly suspect any religiosity at all in that great event. It is represented there *exclusively* in its secular aspects. This attitude is of course not confined to the authors discussed in this essay. The same mixture of myopia and downright refusal to look at the evidence that is there, characterizes a great deal more of the existing literature on the subject.

XIV

Why is tertiary discourse, even of the radical variety, so reluctant to come to terms with the religious element in rebel consciousness? Because it is still trapped in the paradigm which inspired the ideologically contrary, because colonialist, discourse of the primary and secondary types. It follows, in each case, from a refusal to acknowledge the insurgent as the subject of his own history. For once a peasant rebellion has been assimilated to the career of the Raj, the Nation or the People, it becomes easy for the historian to abdicate the responsibility he has of exploring and describing the consciousness specific to that rebellion and be content to ascribe to it a transcendental consciousness. In operative terms, this means denying a will to the mass of the rebels themselves and representing them merely as instruments of some other will. It is thus that in colonialist historiography insurgency is seen as the articulation of a pure spontaneity pitted against the will of the State as embodied in the Raj. If any consciousness is attributed at all to the rebels, it is only a few of their leaders—more often than not some individual members or small groups of the gentry—who are credited with it. Again, in bourgeois-nationalist historiography it is an elite consciousness which is read into all peasant movements as their motive force. This had led to such grotesqueries as the characterization of the Indigo Rebellion of 1860 as 'the first non-violent mass movement'⁴⁸ and generally of all the

⁴⁷ Dhirendranath Baskay, *Saontal Ganasamgramer Itibas* (Calcutta, 1976), p. 66.

⁴⁸ Jogesh Chandra Bagal (ed.), *Peasant Revolution in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1953), p. 5.

popular struggles in rural India during the first hundred and twenty-five years of British rule as the spiritual harbinger of the Indian National Congress.

In much the same way the specificity of rebel consciousness had eluded radical historiography as well. This has been so because it is impaled on a concept of peasant revolts as a succession of events ranged along a direct line of descent—as a heritage, as it is often called—in which all the constituents have the same pedigree and replicate each other in their commitment to the highest ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. In this ahistorical view of the history of insurgency all moments of consciousness are assimilated to the ultimate and highest moment of the series—indeed to an Ideal Consciousness. A historiography devoted to its pursuit (even when that is done, regrettably, in the name of Marxism) is ill-equipped to cope with contradictions which are indeed the stuff history is made of. Since the Ideal is supposed to be one hundred per cent secular in character, the devotee tends to look away when confronted with the evidence of religiosity as if the latter did not exist or explain it away as a clever but well-intentioned fraud perpetrated by enlightened leaders on their moronic followers—all done, of course, ‘in the interests of the people’! Hence, the rich material of myths, rituals, rumours, hopes for a Golden Age and fears of an imminent End of the World, all of which speaks of the self-alienation of the rebel, is wasted on this abstract and sterile discourse. It can do little to illuminate that combination of sectarianism and militancy which is so important a feature of our rural history. The ambiguity of such phenomena, witnessed during the Tebhaga movement in Dinajpur, as Muslim peasants coming to the Kisan Sabha ‘sometimes inscribing a hammer or a sickle on the Muslim League flag’ and young maulavis ‘reciting melodious verse from the Koran’ at village meetings as ‘they condemned the jotedari system and the practice of charging high interest rates’,⁴⁹ will be beyond its grasp. The swift transformation of class struggle into communal strife and vice versa in our countryside evokes from it either some well-contrived apology or a simple gesture of embarrassment, but no real explanation.

However, it is not only the religious element in rebel consciousness which this historiography fails to comprehend. The specificity of a rural insurrection is expressed in terms of many other contradictions

⁴⁹ Sunil Sen, *Agrarian Struggle in Bengal, 1946-47* (New Delhi, 1972), p. 49.

as well. These too are missed out. Blinded by the glare of a perfect and immaculate consciousness the historian sees nothing, for instance, but solidarity in rebel behaviour and fails to notice its Other, namely, betrayal. Committed inflexibly to the notion of insurgency as a generalized movement, he underestimates the power of the brakes put on it by localism and territoriality. Convinced that mobilization for a rural uprising flows exclusively from an overall elite authority, he tends to disregard the operation of many other authorities within the primordial relations of a rural community. A prisoner of empty abstractions tertiary discourse, even of the radical kind, has thus distanced itself from the prose of counter-insurgency only by a declaration of sentiment so far. It has still to go a long way before it can prove that the insurgent can rely on its performance to recover his place in history.

Abbreviations

- BC:* Board's Collections, India Office Records (London).
JC: Fort William Judicial Consultations in *BC*.
JP: Judicial Proceedings, West Bengal State Archives (Calcutta).
MDS: *Maharaja Deby Sinha* (Nashipur Raj Estate, 1914).

Appendix

Extract 1

I came to plunder . . . Sidoo and Kaloo [Kanhu] declared themselves Rajas & [said] they would plunder the whole country and take possession of it—they said also, no one can stop us for it is the order of Takoor. On this account we have all come with them.

Source: JP, 19 July 1855: Balai Majhi's Statement (14 July 1855).

Extract 2

The Thacoor has descended in the house of Seedoo Manjee, Kanoo Manjee, Bhyrub and Chand, at Bhugnudihee in Pergunnah Kunjeala. The Thacoor in person is conversing with them, he has descended from Heaven, he is conversing with Kanoor and Seedoo, The Sahibs and the white Soldiers will fight. Kanoo and Seedoo Manjee are not fighting. The Thacoor himself will fight. Therefore you Sahibs and Soldiers fight with the Thacoor himself Mother Ganges will come to the Thacoor's (assistance) Fire will rain from Heaven. If you are satisfied with the Thacoor then you must go to the other side of the Ganges. The Thacoor has ordered the Sonthals that for a bulluck plough 1 anna is to be paid for revenue. Buffalo plough 2 annas The reign of Truth has begun True justice will be administered He who does not speak the truth will not be allowed to remain on the Earth. The Mahajuns have committed a great sin The Sahibs and the amlah have made everything bad, in this the Sahibs have sinned greatly.

Those who tell things to the Magistrate and those who investigate cases for him, take 70 or 80 R.s. with great oppression in this the Sahibs have sinned. On this account the Thacoor has ordered me saying that the country is not the Sahibs...

P.S. If you Sahibs agree, then you must remain on the other side of the Ganges, and if you dont agree you cant remain on that side of the river, I will rain fire and all the Sahibs will be killed by the hand of God in person and Sahibs if you fight with muskets the Sonthal will not be hit by the bullets and the Thacoor will give your Elephants and horses of his own accord to the Sonthals . . . if you fight with the Sonthals two days will be as one day and two nights as one night. This is the order of the Thacoor.

Source: JP, 4 October 1855: 'The Thacoor's Perwannah' ('dated 10 Saon 1262').

Extract 3

Then the Manjees & Purgunnaitis assembled in my Verandah, & we consulted for 2 months, "that Pontet & Mohesh Dutt don't listen to our complaints & no one acts as our Father & Mother" then a God descended from heaven in the form of a cartwheel & said to me "Kill Pontet & the Darogah & the Mahajuns & then you will have justice & a Father & Mother"; then the Thacoor went back to the heavens; after this 2 men like Bengallees came into my Verhandah; they each had six fingers half a piece of paper fell on my head before the Thacoor came & half fell afterwards. I could not read but Chand & Seheree & a Dhome read it, they said "The Thacoor has written to you to fight the Mahajens & then you will have justice" . . .

Source: JP, 8 November 1855: 'Examination of Sedoo Sonthal late Thacoor'.

Extract 4

In Bysack the God descended in my house I sent a perwannah to the Burra Sahib at Calcutta . . . I wrote that the Thacoor had come to my house & was conversing with me & had told all the Sonthals that they were to be under the charge of me & that I was to pay all the revenue to Government & was to oppress no one & the zamindars & Mahajans were committing great oppression taking 20 pice for one & that I was to place them at a distance from the sonthals & if they do not go away to fight with them.

.

Ishwar was a white man with only a dootee & chudder he sat on the ground like a Sahib he wrote on this bit of paper. He gave me 4 papers but afterwards presented 16 more. The thacoor had 5 fingers on each hand. I did not see him in the day I saw him only in the night. The sonthals then assembled at my house to see the thacoor.

[At Maheshpur] the troops came & we had a fight . . . afterwards seeing that men on our side were falling we both turned twice on them & once drove them away, then I made poojah . . . & then a great many balls came & Seedoo & I were both wounded. The thacoor had said "water will come out of the muskets" but my troops committed some crime therefore the thacoors prediction[s] were not fulfilled about 80 sonthals were killed.

All the blank papers fell from heaven & the book in which all the pages are blank also fell from heaven.

Source: JP, 20 December 1855: 'Examination of Kanoo Sonthal'.

Two Frontier Uprisings in Mughal India¹

GAUTAM BHADRA

Introduction

The existence of a long tradition of peasant and tribal uprisings in India is now a well-recognized fact.² These uprisings are no longer ignored by historians as a subject not worthy of study. Perhaps the political role played by peasants in the nationalist and communist movements in the Third World during this century as well as the programme of agrarian revolution initiated by their radical leaders, have forced historians of all political persuasions to revalue a hitherto submerged and neglected tradition. Some historians, however, are attempting to appropriate this tradition of peasant resistance on behalf of the ruling elites of Third World countries. The polemics have already begun.³ Before we can understand the dynamics of such

¹ I am grateful to Mrs Mandira Sen and Maulavi M. A. Quddus for their help and suggestions. The sketch map of the Mughal north-eastern frontier where the rebellions occurred, is based on Rennell's *Bengal Atlas* (1779) and the district map of Kamrup with additional information from *Kamrupār Buranji* and *Baharistan*. I am indebted to Mrs Keya Dasgupta for drawing the map.

² One of the earliest works is W.C. Smith, 'Lower Class Uprisings in the Mughal Empire', *Islamic Culture* (1946). For the best available general introduction to the subject, see Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India* (Bombay, 1963), Ch. IX. My article in Bengali 'Mughal Juge Krishok Vidroha' ('Peasant Uprisings in Mughal India'), *Ekshan*, Autumn Number (1385 B.S.).

³ Eric Stokes, 'The Return of the Peasant to South Asian History' in *The Peasant and the Raj* (New Delhi, 1978). For a review of this book see Gyanendra Pandey, 'A View of the Observable etc.', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 7:3 (1980). Also see Joy Mukhopadhyay, 'Bharate Krishok Bidroher Itihas Lekhar Samasya' ('Problems of writing the history of peasant uprisings in India': in Bengali), *Deshapremik*, Autumn Number (1387 B.S.).

resistance movements throughout the Third World, I suggest that we begin with an analysis of what took place in our own countries and with this in mind I propose to discuss two frontier uprisings in Mughal India.

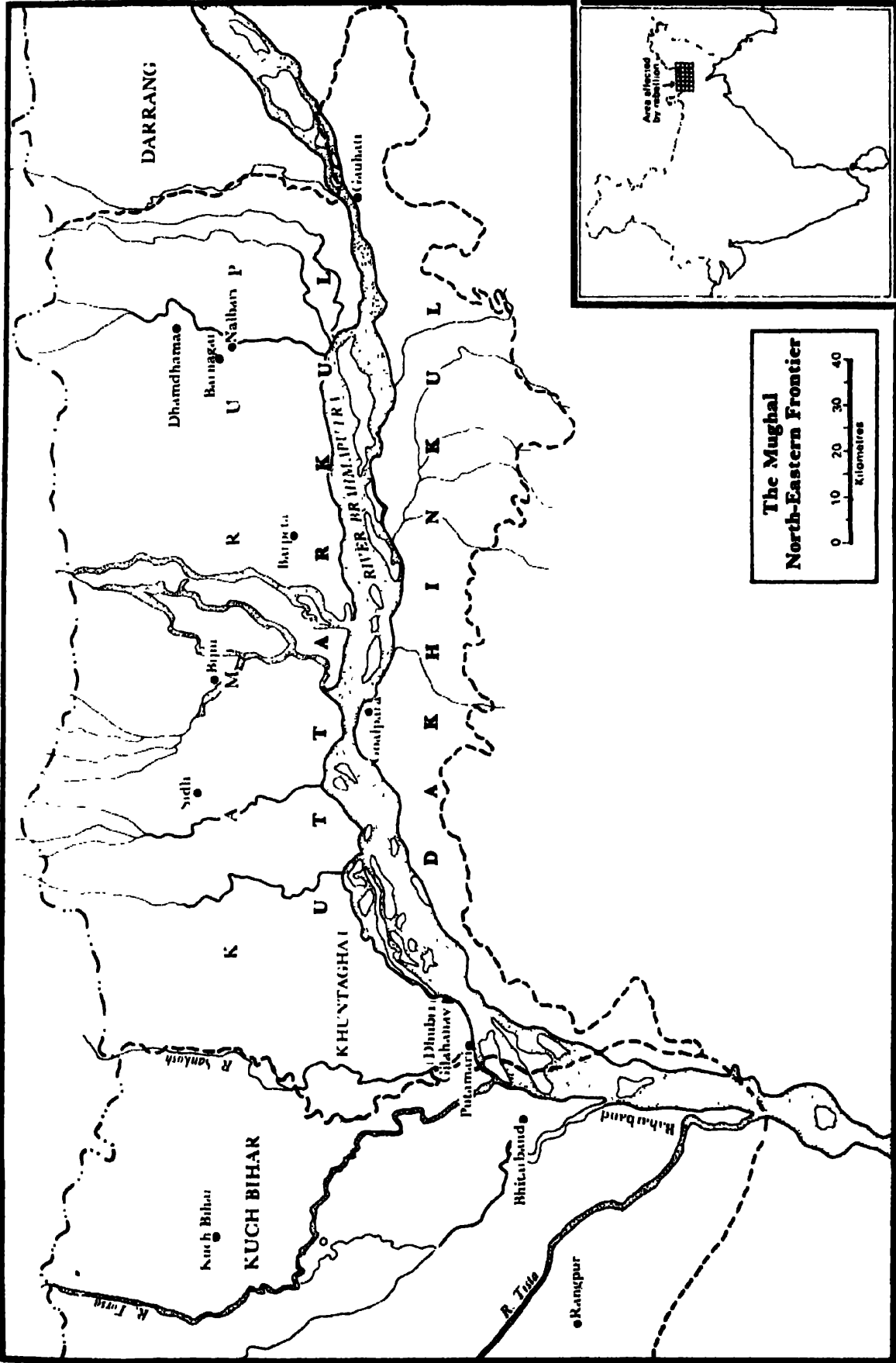
In order to avoid certain misconceptions, let me point out that I do not pretend to have discovered any new material. The source materials used in this study are well known to the scholars of Mughal India. Again, so far as the scope of the study is concerned, my treatment is not comprehensive but selective. I have chosen to examine one region—Kamrup-Goalpara in north-eastern India. This is partly because of the availability of sources and partly because important political developments in this region have once again brought it to our attention at the present. In this article, after analysing the two revolts separately, I will consider their overall importance to the evolving Mughal polity in the context of the problems of integration and domination and of subjection and defiance.

The Revolt of Sanatan Sardar

The revolt of Sanatan Sardar occurred during Jahangir's reign.⁴ During this time the Mughals were expanding their empire in eastern India, and there were numerous revolts throughout Kuch Bihar and on the borders of Assam.⁵ This revolt originally started at Khuntaghat, situated on the south bank of the Brahmaputra and within the present district of Goalpara (1614 A.D.). It spread later

⁴ The principal source is *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* by Mirza Nathan, a contemporary Mughal general, who participated in all the major campaigns in the north-eastern region during the reign of Jahangir. I have consulted the transcribed copy of the only existing manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, preserved in the Jadunath Sarkar Collection, National Library, Calcutta. All subsequent references for pagination given in this article are to this copy of the Sarkar Collection (nos 61-3) cited henceforth as *Baharistan (Sarkar)*. M.I. Borah has made a reliable translation of the same text in Borah, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, 2 vols (Gauhati, 1936). Notes appended to this translation have been extremely helpful. References to this work are cited below as Borah, I-II.

⁵ For a general description of Mughal expansion in this region during the period, see Jadunath Sarkar (ed.), *The History of Bengal*, vol. II (reprint, Patna, 1973), *passim*; Sudhindra Nath Bhattacharya, *Mughal North-East Frontier Policy* (Calcutta, 1929). An account of the rebellion of Sanatan Paik has been given in E. W. Gait, *A History of Assam* (Calcutta, 1926). It is inaccurate and confused in the sequence of events.



to Kamrup, where Sanatan, a headman of the *paiks*, emerged as its leader (1615 A.D.).⁶

The immediate context of the revolt was the Mughal annexation of Kuch Bihar and Kamrup. The death of the governor, Islam Khan, shortly thereafter led to the appointment of Qasim Khan in his place. Qasim Khan inaugurated a new administrative system in the conquered territories. Under his direction, Mirza Hasan divided the parganas of Kuch Bihar into twenty clearly defined circles. Muhammad Zaman Tabrizi was appointed the *karori* (revenue-collector) of the pargana of Khuntaghat. *Karoris* were revenue officers who collected revenue from the conquered area. Apart from the *karoris*, Mirza Hasan also appointed *mustajirs* or revenue farmers and received the bond (*qubuliat*) from them for the parganas given to them.

As the *karori* of Khuntaghat pargana, Muhammad Zaman Tabrizi began to tyrannize the peasants (*raiyat*) and abducted their beautiful daughters and sons for his harem. The peasants killed him by poisoning,⁷ took action against other *karoris* and *mustajirs* who continued to misappropriate vast sums. Shaykh Ibrahim, the *karori* at Kamrup, for instance, increased his wealth by nearly seven lakh rupees. The extent and nature of these revenue abuses perpetrated on the newly annexed areas can be gauged from contemporary records. In *Baharistan*, there is a description of the changes introduced by the

⁶ In the text, these *paiks* are called *archers* (*paikan yani tirandazan*): *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. II, f. 152a. In another place, it is said that Raja Parikshit of Kamrup fought the Mughals with the *kandi paiks* or the archers: *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. I, f. 115a. *Kandi* may be derived from the term *kari*, i.e. archers. In local dialect 'kar' means arrow: see glossary appended to *Thangkhungiya Buranji*, edited and translated by S. K. Bhuyan (Calcutta, 1933), p. 237. Also see *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. II, ff. 146b.

⁷ *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. II, no. 62, 146a to 146b; Borah, I, pp. 272-3. In the course of a description of black magic and sorcery as practised by the inhabitants of this region, Mirza Nathan mentions some details to show how the petty exactions and oppressions of local officials such as *dihidars* and *pattadars* (tenure-holders or revenue-farmers) created an atmosphere of antagonism there. The demand for fish at midnight when fish was not available and the use of violence and torture in order to force the subjects to satisfy the whims of the bailiffs had, according to Nathan, compelled the peasants to use 'black magic' against them. That the Mughal officials came to attribute magical faculties to the local population is itself an index of the mistrust which developed between them and their new rulers. The latter were, as a result, always haunted by a sense of uncertainty and fear. After Muhammad Zaman's death Salim Beg Khaksar, Mirza Babu and a Brahmin (*zunnar-dar*, i.e. holder of the sacred thread) named Raja Ram were sent there as *mustajirs*. None had a very creditable record with the people.

Mughals, which also enables us to gain some idea of the pre-Mughal system of administration. Hence it deserves to be quoted in full:

After Rajah Lakshminarayan's departure Mir Safi . . . introduced a number of changes in the revenue assessment of all the parganas of Jahangirabad and the allowances made in the form of salaries for the *paiks*, that is, archers (*mujrai'ulfe paikan yani tirandazan*) of this area were also charged to revenue assessment (*bar jama'i' afzude*).

Owing to his lack of intelligence, he did not pay any heed to the discord in the region and the sedition of the cultivators and considered himself to be loyal One portion of the parganas was handed over to the *karoris* and another portion to the *mustajirs*. Then he left them after making necessary arrangements for each of them. When the *mustajirs* after a slight increase in assessment (*juzwe bar jama' afzude*) brought the parganas under their own possession and thought of increasing it more for their own benefit and expenses (*bar nafa' wa ikhrajat*), it augmented the causes of discontent among the *ra'aya*.⁸

Mir Safi was, however, removed from the office of *Diwan* and *Bakshi* in Kamrup owing to several complaints against him; but despite this the situation did not improve much.

After the annexation of the north-eastern kingdoms the Mughals had not taken any direct action against the princes of this region. Islam Khan and Qasim Khan had promised to maintain the dignity of Lakshminarayan, king of Kuch Bihar, and Parikshitnarayan, king of Kamrup. But in blatant violation of his promise Qasim Khan placed Lakshminarayan and Parikshitnarayan under surveillance (*nazr band*) and deported them to the distant court of the Mughal Emperor. This action roused the nobles and exacerbated tension leading to the outbreak of the revolt at Khuntaghat. During 1615-16 the peasants killed the *karoris* and *mustajirs*. The Kuch nobles joined their rebellion and proclaimed one of themselves as the *raja*. The Mughal commander Allama Beg was killed along with many of his soldiers. The rebels occupied the land up to Rangamati and besieged Jahangirabad, formerly Gilahanay (about ten miles north of Dhubri), the principal administrative centre, and the fortified residence of King Parikshit. Mughal authority almost disappeared from this region.⁹

⁸ *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. II, no. 62, 152a; cf. Borah, I, pp. 288-9. This description has been corroborated by the Assamese sources, S. K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Kamrupār Buranji* (Calcutta, 1930), p. 27.

⁹ The paragraph is based on the events described in *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. II, ff. 153b, 157a-b, ff. 169a; cf. Borah, I. Chs. II and IV, pp. 290-352.

Mirza Yusuf Barlas, *thanadar* from Dakhinkul, south Kamrup, described the helplessness of the Mughal army, pleading for immediate help and pointing out that without aid he and his forces would suffer the same fate as Allama Beg's army had:

This is a serious uprising of the enemies and they are driving us from place to place. They have not stopped chasing us and we have been driven back to the bank of the Brahmaputra. For the third day, we are encamped on the sandy plains and we are besieged by the enemy in such a way that even a straw was not available for horses, not to speak of grains.¹⁰

The rebels were finally defeated by their own vacillation and the strategy of Mirza Nathan. But it was not a lasting defeat. Despite the imprisonment of the rebel leader and the destruction of their forts at Putamari and Takunia, the peasants of Khuntaghat were not effectively subdued. They continued to offer resistance, especially during the rainy season when Mughal communication links were weakened and Mirza Nathan was absent.

It was at this moment that Sanatan, the Kuch chief of the *paiks*, began to harass the *karori*, Shaykh Ibrahim, and declared his revolt in Kamrup.

Sanatan, one of the Kuchs in the area of Kamrup assumed kingship (*Sanatan ke yeki az kuchan dar mulke Kamrup ba rajgi bardashte*) and put Shaykh Ibrahim to great straits.¹¹

The *paiks* alleged that 'Shaykh Ibrahim not only put us to distress but also takes away the beautiful girls and handsome boys of our families and he is persisting in doing this'.¹²

The Mughal army, under the leadership of Mirza Nathan, was ineffective against Sanatan due to his alliance with the local peasants. The Mughals failed to occupy the *paik's* fort, Dhamdhama, which was situated in the Nalbari pargana of Kamrup. Mirza Nathan sent proposals for peace, with the assurance that Shaykh Ibrahim would be dismissed. Sanatan's reply has been preserved in the writing of Mirza Nathan. As the voice of a rebel leader, it is a very important document:

The oppression perpetuated in this region you have been informed of. Now the cultivators (*ra'aya*) have no strength or capacity (*qudrat wa*

¹⁰ *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. II, f. 158a; Borah, I, p. 302.

¹¹ *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. II, f. 179a.

¹² *Ibid.*, ff. 180b; Borah, I, p. 360.

taqat) to pay attention to sending revenue (*malguzari*). So how can your coming here satisfy me? Two of our great princes have surrendered to the emperor and paid lakhs and crores of rupees. What benefits have they reaped which I may consider as advantages? However, I agree to the following terms. I shall hand over one of my brothers for Your Excellency's service (*ba khidmate huzur*) on the condition that first, stern punishment should be meted out to Shaykh Ibrahim; secondly, the revenue should be remitted for full one year; thirdly, the Mughal soldiers will have to return to Gilahanay; fourthly, the allowance of the *paiks* should be paid direct to them and should not be made as an addition to the revenue due to the government (*mujarai' paikan ra dakhel jama'na karde*).¹³

Mirza Nathan accepted Sanatan's first proposal but not the others. As a result Sanatan continued the resistance. Direct assaults on his fort were repelled again and again. Sanatan's success permitted him to declare himself raja. In retaliation Mirza Nathan razed the neighbouring villages to the ground so that the rebels' sources of supply were destroyed.

It took Mirza Nathan two days to destroy those villages; nearly two thousand food-suppliers were killed or taken prisoner by him. These details are an indication of the support and loyalty enjoyed by the Kuch rebel leader in the neighbouring villages.¹⁴ The rebel fortress fell to the Mughals after a siege lasting about three months. Sanatan was forced to flee to the hill tracts, from where he continued his resistance against Mughal authority. When Raja Parikshit's brother Baladev also known as Bali Narayan, rose in rebellion, Sanatan joined him and attacked Mirza Yusuf. Later when Shaykh Ibrahim himself defied imperial orders and took up arms, Sanatan joined him, helping his erstwhile enemy.¹⁵

The Hathikheda Uprising

Hathi kheda (capture of elephants) sparked off the second uprising in 1621. Khuntaghat was once again the centre. Elephants were indispensable for the army: they carried war materials into the jungles of Assam and were used to seize forts in the hill tracts. It was one of the duties of the ryots to help the Mughal army to capture elephants. The services of the *palis* were necessary in order to keep the elephants confined within the enclosure (*qamargah*) while those of the

¹³ *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. II, ff. 180b to 181a; cf. Borah, I. p. 370.

¹⁴ *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, ff. 183b-184b, Borah, I, pp. 378-81.

¹⁵ *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, ff. 207a-b.

gharduwari paiks (auxiliary footmen) were required to drive the elephants into the enclosure. Government officers were sent with special instruments to draft the *gharduwari paiks* from their lands.¹⁶ This practice disrupted the ryots' work on their own lands and was naturally resented by them.

Baqir Khan, a Mughal officer, carried out a *hathi kheda*. Some of the elephants escaped while being put in chains. In consequence the leading elephant drivers among the *pali* and *gharduwari paiks* were sentenced to death and the others were whipped. Baqir Khan ordered, 'Either bring the escaped elephants here or pay rupees one thousand for each elephant.' This was the immediate cause of the revolt. In the words of Mirza Nathan,

These discontented people instigated the people of the region (*able mulk ra*) against him, and they attacked at night. Baqir Khan was caught alive and was cut in two pieces. The soldiers of the army who fought were all killed and the others were held prisoners, and all the elephants of the government were confiscated. They proclaimed a headman of the elephant-drivers as their king, rose in open revolt and created an amazing situation.¹⁷

The rebellion spread to other classes. Bhaba Singh, the Kuch noble and brother of Raja Parikshit, became involved in it. The tyranny of Balabhadra, the Hindu Diwan of Mirza Nathan, had roused the peasants who joined the insurrection. The rebels imprisoned the family of Qulij Khan, the Mughal commander of Kuch Bihar. Jahangirabad was raided and stockades were built at Bangaoan and Madhupur on either side of the river at Goalpara. Mirza Nathan suppressed this uprising after much effort. The words of his rivals suggest that this revolt was conducted by the ordinary people belonging to a particular lower caste. 'Have you subdued any rebel', they taunted, 'other than a group of fishermen (*machwagiri*) who built a fort at Goalpara?'¹⁸

The Paik System

An analysis of these two rebellions makes a few things clear. First,

¹⁶ *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. III, No.63, ff. 287b-288a; Borah, II, p. 676.

¹⁷ *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. III, ff. 274a; Borah, II, pp. 638-9.

¹⁸ *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. III, f. 287b; Borah, II, p. 651. It is to be noted that *machuas* meant *jaliya keota* in this region in the mid-nineteenth century. See W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam* (London, 1879), vol. II, p. 44.

these took place in the same area, though they sprang from different causes. In the first place, it was the coercion of the cultivators by the Mughal revenue collectors and the revenue farmers which was the main cause of the conflict. In order to understand the nature of the uprising, however, it is necessary to look at the complaints of the *paiks*. These were peasants who also worked as the nobles' soldiers or armed retainers. In return for serving their masters in war or manning the border regions they were given arable land free of revenue charges. Such land was known as *paikan* or *chakran*. In reality, in Kuch Bihar and Assam peasants customarily paid revenue in terms of labour and not in cash, receiving land in return. In fact the evidence of *Fathiya-i-Ibriya* by Sihabuddin Talish, *waqai navis* (a news-reporter) of Mir Jumla and the Mughal *sanads* for the zamindari of Gauripur in 1676 indicates the existence of rights over land granted in exchange for this kind of service.¹⁹

The geneology of the princely family of Kuch Bihar and the stone inscriptions on temples built by Chila Roy shows that the grantees of *paikan* land fell into different categories according to the services for which such grants were made. For instance, land was given to 140 families of votaries of the temples, among whom were blacksmiths, weavers, messengers, panegyrist and so on.²⁰ The official history of Shah Jahan's reign states that such people 'were given jagirs by order of the king. Those soldiers are known as *paiks* . . . for their livelihood they are employed in the work of cultivation (*ba zira'at*) and also in capturing and driving elephants.'²¹ A similar account has been given in the *Fathiya-i-ibriya*. 'To collect revenue from the peasant of these areas is not the rule. From every house one person in every three was brought for the services to the king (*az har khana fi seh nafar eyak nafar ba khidmate raje qaim numaid*).'²²

¹⁹ Ranajit Guha, 'A Report on Gauripur Archives', in *Annual Report, Regional Record Survey Committee, West Bengal, 1955-56*.

²⁰ K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrup* (Shillong, 1933), pp. 298-300.

²¹ Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Padshah Namah*, edited by Maulavi Kabiruddin and Maulavi Abdur Rahim, *Bibliotheca Indica*, vol. II (Calcutta, 1867-8), p. 71.

²² *Fathiya-i-ibriya*, Mss. Sarkar Collection (a copy of Asiatic Society of Bengal Ms). no. 77, ff. 57a. For a detailed discussion, see Amalendu Guha, 'Mediaeval North East India: Polity, Society & Economy, 1200-1500 A.D.', *Occasional Papers, No. 19*, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (mimeo). There is a suggestion in some of the sources that thanks to the elaborate revenue arrangements made by the imperial officials the pressure on the peasant was to be less acute in the territory of the chiefs

It is clear that the *paikan* system played an important role in the agricultural economy of Assam and Kuch Bihar. All active males other than the higher officials, slaves and priests were brought within the purview of the *paikan* system through *gote* ('service'). Each *gote* generally consisted of four peasants. A peasant became a *paik* by rotation. He would render his services to the king for one year while other members of his *gote* looked after his land. Some difficulties regarding the analysis of the *paikan* system should however be considered. The evidence from contemporary Persian sources points to a system of land tenure based on labour service in this region on the eve of the Mughal administration. But the indigenous sources are of later origin and refer to the nature of Ahom administration in Kamrup in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries rather than to the Kuch administrative system in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. However, it seems that the features are broadly similar, though in a subsequent period social differentiation developed more fully. In Darrang, there is an account of the *paikan* system established by Nara Narayan in pre-Mughal days. 'The king afterwards made a census and created the *paiks* He made four people (*chari pawa*) equivalent to a *gote* of *paiks*.'²³ There is, of course, confirmation on the working of the system from other *Vamshabalis* written in almost the same period. It was said that the soldiers of the Kuch king were given about the twelve bighas of land as an allowance in lieu of a cash payment.²⁴ It can therefore be concluded that on the whole the general information, if not the detail, supplied by these local sources

than in that directly administered by the Mughals (Habib, op. cit., p. 336). Under the administrative system of the Ahoms, the *paiks* were allowed to hold two *pauras* of the best rice-lands. To an extent too they had also a voice in the election of their leaders, *saikias*, *boras* or *hazarikgs*. Most of the land owned by the chiefs was, however, cultivated by the slaves. See Gait, op. cit., pp. 239-40, 241-2; Bhuyan, *Kamrupār Buranji*, p. 112; Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, ed. by S.K. Bhuyan (Guhati, 1963), pp. 22-4.

²³ Baldev Surya-Khari Daibagya, *Darrang Raj Vamshavali*, edited by Navinchandra Sharma (Gauhati, 1963), p. 64. The text however is a history of the Kuch kings written in the late eighteenth century.

²⁴ Khan Chaudhury Amanatullah Ahmed, *Koch-Beharer Itihas* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1936), p. 125. Ripunjay Das, *Maharaj-Vamshabali*, edited by Nripendra Nath Pal (Kuchbihar, 1383 B.S.), p. 4. Amanatullah Ahmed's book is probably one of the best local histories written in Bengali on the basis of the information provided by *vamshavalis* in this region.

of the later period confirms the working of the system as depicted in the Persian chronicles.

The Assamese sources written during Ahom rule in Kamrup in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries indicate two other important features of the *paikan* system. According to the *Buranjis*, *karis* or archers were associated with the lower castes. In general, under the Ahom administration, the *karis* were treated as people of inferior status and enjoyed fewer privileges than the *chamuas* who were skilled artisans and not bound to go to war. A *kari* was allowed to enter an upper caste group, but his position was still marked by a social stigma.²⁵ The Kuch, too, who constituted the bulk of the *paiks*, were treated by the eighteenth-century Ahoms as being of rather low status. Thus among the *paiks* there were many who came from lower caste professions and were treated as social inferiors by the Ahom elite.

Secondly, the Assamese evidence suggests a kind of growing differentiation within this region. Haliram Dhekyal Phukan mentioned *paiks* who did not pay labour service (*gamati*). They were called *chamua*, as mentioned earlier. He also referred to a privileged land tenure called *bhala manuhiya zamin* or the lands enjoyed by the *bhadralok*. He compared this with a situation when the entire land had been held revenue free. In *Kamrupār Buranji* it was suggested that Shaykh Ibrahim introduced the pargana land administration in this area. After 1684 the Ahoms made a hierarchical structure of revenue administration, following the Mughal tradition, and introduced a variety of tenures with different terms and obligations.²⁶ Some of the inscriptions of this period also suggest the existence of various kinds of land tenure in this area.²⁷ We may infer from these Assamese sources that the impact of the Mughal and the Ahom administrations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to a growing differentiation within the peasantry. Moreover, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the community bondage among

²⁵ For a detailed discussion, see S. K. Bhuyan, *Ahomer Din* (in Assamese: Jorehat, 1918), pp. 52-3, 55, 72. Haliram Dhekyal Phukan, *Assam Buranji* (1829), edited by J. M. Bhattacharya (Gauhati, 1369 B.S.), p. 54. It is an informative account of the Ahom administrative system in Kamrup during the eighteenth century by a person long connected with the administrative system in this region. He himself belonged to the family of a local customs official of Kamrup.

²⁶ Phukan, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-4; Bhuyan, *Kamrupār Buranji*, p. 112-13.

²⁷ Maheswar Neogi (ed.), *Prachya Sasanaivali* (Gauhati, 1974), pp. 118-19.

the paiks, soldiers as well as cultivators, was perhaps stronger within a less differentiated agrarian society, especially where the bulk of the cultivators belonged to the same caste group. The paikan system was perhaps sufficiently well integrated with the community to make any disruption in the distributive machinery affect both sardars and cultivators. This would explain why their reactions were so violent and quick. Land assessment and the rigid jama or collection were seen as evils by the ordinary peasant because these left him less room for manoeuvre. The Mughal land revenue administration aimed at and achieved greater control through the karoris and mustajirs who became, consequently, the target of the peasants' anger.

The Mughal System Versus The Paik System

As the Mughals had the *mansabdari* system for procuring soldiers and since they emphasized the importance of the collection of revenue directly in cash, they were not interested in maintaining the *paikan* system. Consequently, this new system acted against the interest of the *paiks* and their chiefs, that is, those who were their leaders in times of war. Moreover, the Mughals brought the hitherto untaxed *paikan* land under assessment. Taxes had now to be paid in crops or in cash. Besides, the farmers increased the rate of revenue. Conflicts arose between the fiscal system of cash or crop payment based on a rent-roll and the centralized military system on the one hand, and the extraction of revenue in terms of labour-service based on decentralized local powers on the other. As pointed out earlier, Sanatan, in his letter, spoke directly in favour of the latter system which had been seriously disrupted by the Mughals. He asked, therefore, for a remission of revenue and for an exemption of the land of the *paiks* from assessment. His proposals did not agree, of course, with the Mughal practice of extracting the maximum possible social surplus. Common subjects and *paiks*, or those who were both cultivators and soldiers, revolted. It was in the context of a general atmosphere of agrarian discontent that the rebellion led by the Kuch nobles became formidable.

Three currents of discontent can be perceived in the first of these rebellions as having arisen from the grievances of (a) the ordinary ryots, (b) the *paiks* or a special class of ryots and soldiers, and (c) the Kuch nobility. The existence and leadership of armed ryots in Kamrup transformed this revolt into a resistance which commanded wide

support from the people for a long time. At one stage the Mughal state power even came out with the proposal for a ceasefire and was prepared to compromise.

In the second uprising at Khuntaghat the immediate cause for the disturbance was the state's demand of service for catching elephants. Here the ryots who trapped and tamed elephants as a profession, were the first to rise in revolt, and were then joined by other oppressed cultivators. They probably belonged to a low caste, and their leadership fell into the hands of one of their own headmen. The second rebellion was, therefore, the work of a comparatively lower and poorer section of the peasants. Here too we find the name of a Kuch noble, but the part he played is rather obscure. It appears that the leadership lay in the hands of ryots of the lower strata and not in those of any upper caste group. This was perhaps because specialization in chasing elephants had to be acquired by a particular class of ryots, giving rise to solidarity. Since they were a cohesive group, it might have been comparatively easy for them to provide the requisite leadership. It is clearly indicated in the writings of Nathan that the ryots engaged in chasing elephants were skilled in a particular profession and that it was they who took the initiative to mobilize the common people. This uprising arose from two currents connected with (a) the grievances of *gharduwari paiks* and *pali paiks*, and (b) those of the ordinary cultivators.

In terms of participation and mobilization one point is to be particularly emphasized. Some of the rebellions had an obviously aristocratic linkage. The humiliation suffered by the traditional rulers was certainly a factor behind the uprising. For instance, Sanatan, the rebel leader, possessed a fort and was once described by Mirza as a raja.²⁸ In his petition, he also referred to the injustice meted out to his kings. Hence the vertical linkages within a landed society, operating between lords, vassals and ordinary subjects, might have been invoked to mobilize the people. These vertical linkages had a special

²⁸ Nathan says, 'This Rajah and his fort are not of that nature from which you can expect any income after the conquest': *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. II, f. 180a. The sentence is suggestive of the fact that Sanatan was not a prosperous chief. However, Sanatan did belong to the category of a zamindar or a feudal chief, and was probably a hereditary leader of a number of *paiks*. Under the Ahom King chief officials like Burha Gohain, Bar Gohain and Bar Patra Gohain commanded the services of 10,000 *paiks* each. Such posts were ordinarily confined to particular clans and were hereditary in nature. Borah, II, p. 846.

importance in the context of the specific historical development of the frontier region. The period immediately preceding Mughal penetration here had witnessed the rise of the Kuch principality under Naranarayan. It has been suggested that they belonged to the Mech or Bodo tribal groups.²⁹ It was during this period that they were transforming themselves into a dominant caste. With the establishment of a strong principality in the course of the fifteenth century Naranarayan renovated the temples of the goddess Kamakhya, patronized Sanskrit scholars and established a claim to his family's connection with the mythical exploits of Parashurama against the Kshatriyas.³⁰ Later on the Kuchs were also to assume the appellation *Rajbanshi* in this area.³¹ Hence in the early sixteenth century the Kuch nobility and population may have felt a strong attachment to their royal house, which became a focal point and visible symbol of their social mobility and of the social power in this region. This bond was strong, as suggested by Nathan's account about the reaction of the Kuch nobles to the arrest of their kings.

Due to the circulation in the territory of Kuch of the news of the arrest of the two *rajahs*, some of the Kuch chiefs (*raiyane kuchan*) in order to wipe off their bad reputation (*badnami*) raised an insurrection.³²

The suggestion of disgrace felt by the Kuch nobility because of the dishonour to their rulers at the hands of the Mughal authorities is unmistakable here. The attitude of Sanatan Sardar merely underlined the same sense of disgrace. The frequent insurrections by Parashuram in Dakhinkul and Jadu Nayak, another *sardar* of the *paiks* in this area also suggested the general antipathy felt by the *sardars* against Mughal

²⁹ B.R. Hodgson, 'Koch, Bodo and Dhimal Tribes', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. XVIII, part II (1849), pp. 704-5. In the genealogy of this dynasty, the fugitive Kshatriya princes were said to have married Mech women and twelve powerful Mech houses descended from those unions. The wife of Haria Mundal, the chief of the Mech, gave birth to a son named Vishnu who was the real founder of the royal house of Kuch Bihar (Daibagya, op. cit., pp. 8-10). The legend is suggestive of that well-known social process by which a tribe aspiring for access to economic power and political domination used the puranic tradition to bolster its prestige within the caste hierarchy.

³⁰ Ahmed, op. cit., pp. 126-9. Daibagya, op. cit., pp. 67-8, 102-12, 123-5.

³¹ E. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1872), p. 89; W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. X (Calcutta, 1876), p. 353.

³² *Baharistan (Sarkar)*, vol. II, f. 153b.

conquest.³³ Again, in the early nineteenth century, Francis Buchanan hinted at the caste composition of the agrarian population in this area saying, 'Thus in the territory of the Khuntaghat on the Bisne river, belonging to one of their powerful chiefs, almost every cultivator is called a Rajbanshi.'³⁴ Hence, in this type of agrarian society, where most of the cultivators as well as their chiefs belonged to the same caste group, mobilization often followed the lines of social linkages binding rajas, *sardars* and cultivators in a common struggle. Dishonourable treatment meted out to a royal house, or a breach of trust with respect to the latter, could easily have been construed as an affront to the prestige of the community, particularly to that of the chiefs.

But in the *Hathi-kheda* rebellion, the opposite seems to have been the case. It was a spontaneous insurrection of the elephant-catchers and the language used by Mirza Nathan indicates that they themselves elected a leader from their midst. The ryots oppressed by Balabhadra quickly joined their ranks. The Kuch nobles came later. It seems that here the initiative lay with the lower strata of the peasantry and their action was an incentive to others to follow them. These two contrasting types of mobilization suggest that the uprisings of the peasants under the leadership and initiative of the zamindars was not the only type of peasant revolt witnessed in this area. There might have been other types too characterized by a different kind of mobilization.

In spite of differences two common tendencies may be observed in these two revolts. First, there was a tradition of frequent resistance on the part of the peasants and their chiefs against the Mughal imperial power. Whatever might be the cause of conflict, whether over collection of additional revenue or over the right to capture elephants, the peasants of this region time and again rose in rebellion. Secondly, it appears that those who were already engaged in strictly specialized professions or were moving towards some degree of specialization, were in the vanguard of rebellion, as were the militia-men and archers in the revolt headed by Sanatan and the *gharduwari* and *pali paiks* in that of the elephant-catchers.

The regional characteristics of these two revolts should also be noted. Both revolts erupted in the border areas of Bengal and Assam. The Mughals had recently conquered these regions. Further, the social system and fiscal organization were quite different in these

³³ Borah, II, pp. 505-23, 532-3, 662-4.

³⁴ Buchanan-Hamilton, *Report on Rungpur*, Mss. Eur. D. 74, book II, ff. 140-1.

parts from those in northern India. The existence of tribes over a wide area made the polity of this region more complicated. Hence it was comparatively easy for the ryots to rise in revolt ever so often against the relatively weak Mughal forces in these outposts of the empire.

In fact, the discontent among the peasantry of this region was never anything but acute, and it reared its head as soon as an opportunity arose. Thus the ryots of Putamari deferred payments to the Mughals when Balabhadra, the Hindu officer of Mirza Nathan, went there. The ryots of Khatribag, the jagir of Nathan himself, refused to pay revenue, taking advantage of the floods. Afterwards, they were subdued with the help of the local zamindars. When some merchants went to collect rations for the Mughal soldiers, the peasants from the villages of Kendugiri and Badhantara attacked and plundered them.³⁵ Mirza Nathan, after he was awarded the title 'Khan', became dissatisfied with the work of the elephant-chasers and whipped the headman of the *paiks*. In consequence, the latter became sorely aggrieved, and the danger of another violent insurrection loomed large. The crisis passed when another Mughal officer, Khaja Sadat Khan, found himself in a tight corner and was forced to release the *sardars* and conciliate Baki Laskar, the headman of elephant-catcher *paiks*.³⁶ Again, during the reign of Aurangzeb, the people of Kuch Bihar revolted in support of their chief against the revenue arrangement of Mir Jumlah.³⁷ Thus the defiance of Mughal authority by various groups of people was a constant feature in this region from Jahangir's reign to Aurangzeb's and the elaborate system of dominance evolved by the Mughal authority was frequently challenged both by the people and their chiefs.

Violence and counter-violence embedded in this type of rebellion deserve our attention. Both Baqir Khan and Mirza Nathan demonstrably punished the *pali* and *gharduwari paiks* for their failure in duty. The rebels also reacted with violence in no uncertain terms against Baqir Khan. One of the attributes of any authority lies in a right to punish. This appears to have been understood both by the Mughal power and the lowly peasants. Hence a counter-assertion of power by the rebels always took the form of violent punishment meted

³⁵ *Babaristan (Sarkar)*, vol. II, ff. 169a.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. III, ff. 288b.

³⁷ *Fathiya*, ff. 80a-b.

out to the officials such as Allāma Beg or Baqir Khan. This was invariably a signal of the temporary suspension of Mughal authority in this region and created an atmosphere of general insurrection.

Conclusion

These revolts were not very large in scale and were ultimately suppressed. But their frequent recurrence in this frontier area was an index of the relative failure on the part of the Mughals to integrate peripheral zones within the state structure. In this area the cultivators, under the leadership of some specialized groups, participated in the insurrection. These were more popular in character because caste solidarity as well as community bonds were stronger in these parts for various reasons. Horizontal and vertical linkages of mobilization were both operative in this region. Here, however, a relatively organized system based on service-tenure was replaced by a more centralized and hierarchical system. The Mughal state power appeared to be an intrusion to the chiefs as well as the members of the society. The fact of its existence as well as the mode of its operation were disruptive to all who constituted the agrarian society. The prestige of one of the autonomous chiefs regarded as powerful even by the Mughal chronicler was at stake. The status of the *sardars* was threatened. The oppression on the family as well as the property of the ordinary cultivators was perpetuated. Rural life was in fact greatly disturbed. Hence the exercise of Mughal authority led inevitably into turmoil and disintegration within this society. In this situation defiance and rebellion was the only recourse people had. In this sense, frontier uprisings with all their variations were a part of the general tradition of rebellion and agrarian resistance that rocked the Mughal state time and again. In this area these uprisings also marked the beginning of a tradition of peasant resistance that was invoked again and again in various forms against Mir Jumla, against the Ahoms during the Moamaria revolt and against British rule in the late nineteenth century.

Rallying round the Cow

Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpuri Region, c. 1888-1917¹

GYAN PANDEY

The Bhojpuri-speaking districts of east UP² and west Bihar became the storm-centre of a powerful Cow-Protection movement that gripped much of north and central India in the late nineteenth century. The Punjab, where the movement was launched under the aegis of the Arya Samaj sometime in 1882, and the Central Provinces where its official headquarters appear to have been located from about the end of that decade, were long described as the chief centres of the Cow-Protection Societies or Gaurakshini Sabhas. Yet it was in the Bhojpuri region that Cow-Protection, as a movement, had its deepest impact. Here, particularly in the districts of Azamgarh, Ballia and Ghazipur in UP, Saran and Shahabad in Bihar (and the neighbouring Gaya and Patna districts just outside the Bhojpuri-speaking area) the

¹ The Bhojpuri-speaking region, as identified by G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. V, pt. II (1903; Delhi reprint, 1968), pp. 42-3 covers the districts of Azamgarh, Banaras, Ghazipur, Ballia, the eastern parts of Faizabad and Jaunpur, northern Mirzapur, Shahabad and Saran. Bhojpuri was also spoken by a majority of the inhabitants in the trans-Ghaghra districts of Gorakhpur and Basti in UP, and a variant of it called Nagpuria in the Chota Nagpur plateau of South Bihar: however these tracts, both fairly different in physical and social characteristics from the central Bhojpuri belt, are taken into account only marginally in the following study. See map on p. 66.

I owe thanks to Gautam Bhadra, Partha Chatterjee and Barun De for their comments on an earlier draft, and to Ms. Anjuri Chakravarti for the preparation of the map.

² UP refers to present-day Uttar Pradesh, previously known as the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh.

agitation appears to have acquired its greatest social depth and an unexpected militancy. Developments in the area culminated in serious rioting between Hindus and Muslims at the Baqr-Id of 1893, when the weaving town of Maunath Bhanjan (generally referred to simply as Mau) in Azamgarh district became the chief battlefield in a widespread attack upon Muslims mounted by large bodies of Hindus from the surrounding country.

The network of Gaurakshini Sabhas established in the 1880s and 1890s seems to have been disbanded after this, and the movement effectively suppressed. But the cow-protection idea was far from being banished. It surfaced again as a major force in the region in the years after 1910. In 1912 and 1913 violence rocked Ayodhya in Faizabad district, the renowned capital of the legendary kingdom of Rama and a place of exceptional sanctity for Hindus, which lay on the boundaries of the Bhojpuri tract. Then, following a further build-up of tension in many places in 1915 and 1916, the district of Shahabad was witness to a disastrous conflagration in 1917, a huge Hindu rising that very quickly assumed the proportions of a civil war.

Several historians have written about the Gaurakshini Sabhas and the later riots linked with the question of cow-protection, and sought to account for this massive outbreak of sectarian strife in the Bhojpuri region, not to be repeated on this scale in the rural areas at least until the 1940s. Some have viewed the agitation around this issue as a product, pure and simple, of elite (and *ipso facto* urban) initiative, which petered out because of insufficient mass support. Francis Robinson observes, in his thoroughly researched account of the emergence of Muslim separatist politics in north India, that the Cow-Protection movement spread from the Punjab to UP in 1886 when the High Court ruled that the cow was not an 'object' as laid down in the law regarding incitement to religious violence, and hence Muslims who slaughtered cows could not be held guilty under this law. It was in the towns, according to Robinson, that the subsequent 'drive to protect Hindu interests' had its greatest impact; for nearly two-thirds of UP's urban population was Muslim and it was in the towns, too, that the supporters of militantly anti-Muslim revivalist groups were concentrated. The outcome of this analysis is, however, ironical: Robinson has to relegate to a footnote what he calls 'the most severe communal outbreaks of the century', namely the riots of

1893 in eastern UP, on the curious ground that these, like the 1912-13 clashes in Faizabad, 'were rural not urban affairs'.³

In the most detailed account of the Cow-Protection movement to have been published so far, John McLane goes one step further. The timing of the riots and newspaper comments upon them, he argues, indicate the connection of the Cow-Protection movement with Congress-'Muslim' [*sic*] disagreements over the 1892 Legislative Council reforms. Further, the rapid collapse of the organizational apparatus of the movement after 1893 'suggests that popular sentiment was not broad or adamant and that Hindu leaders regarded the alienation of Muslims and the government as too heavy a price to pay for any possible benefits'.⁴ Yet, if McLane had paid closer attention not only to the timing but also to the scale of the riots, the identity of the participants and the slogans and symbols behind which they united, he would have found, I think, that the 1892 Councils Act and the aspirations of a few Hindu politicians are altogether too narrow a reason for the outbreak of agitation on this scale—or for its collapse.

Other scholars, delving deeper, have suggested that the Cow-Protection agitation and riots represent the last-ditch efforts of a declining zamindari class, threatened by its own over-population, a sharp rise in prices and the growing assertiveness of a tenantry that was now better protected than ever before. 'Displacement of leaders (zamindars and officials) associated with fluctuating prices: this is the picture which emerges in the background of the Shahabad riots', writes Peter Robb after a detailed analysis of the 1917 outbreak. And while 'the officials ... with their foreign traditions and their hierarchy and rules were not able to politicise their role as local leaders . . . this was surely what was happening in part if landlords in Shahabad made common cause with tenants over cow-killing'.⁵ By unfurling the banner of the cow, and deliberate assaults upon the villages and

³ F. Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims. The Politics of the United Provinces Muslims, 1860-1923* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 78-9 and footnote.

⁴ J. R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress* (Princeton, 1977), pp. 273, 326-7, also p. 296.

⁵ P. G. Robb, 'Officials and Non-officials as Leaders in Popular Agitations: Shahabad 1917 and Other Conspiracies', in B. N. Pandey (ed.), *Leadership in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1977), pp. 198-9, 203; Sandria Freitag, 'Sacred Symbol as Mobilizing Ideology: The North Indian Search for a "Hindu" Community', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (1981). Unfortunately I was unable to read this paper, and that by Anand A. Yang in the same issue, before the completion of this article.

homes of Muslim neighbours, the Hindu zamindars of the district apparently hoped to bring back to the fold their increasingly recalcitrant tenants and other dependants.

The evidence regarding a struggling small zamindari class is not inconsiderable. Yet such an analysis is perhaps a little too facile. For one thing, the wealth of local detail makes no dent in the élitism of outlook. We learn comparatively little about the very substantial (and I shall argue, autonomous) part played by particular non-zamindari castes, notably the Ahirs, in the Shahabad events of 1917. We learn nothing at all about the reasons why certain targets and certain symbols of unity were chosen and why various groups with conflicting interests so readily rallied round these symbols. Was the decision to make a scapegoat of the Bhojpuri Muslims quite fortuitous? Or, are we to believe that they were never considered a part of the local society? And do we not return, by this roundabout route, to the nineteenth-century colonial belief in the essential fanaticism of the masses in all matters of religion?⁶

These questions relate in fact to more than a few isolated studies of the Cow-Protection movement. They are concerned with assumptions underlying a whole range of analyses of the phenomenon called 'communalism' by writers and observers of Indian history. One of the easiest of these is that the depth of religious feeling almost automatically leads to 'communalism', if indeed the two are not synonymous. Scholars tend to forget the run of semantic leaps required to give this view a degree of plausibility. The term 'communalism' is never applied, in the same sense, to feudal Europe or other pre-capitalist societies where religiosity was no shallower and sectarian strife not rare: it is reserved for the analysis of Indian society in the colonial period and then read back by some as a quality that must have existed in the subcontinent long before this.

Even after this, there is the need for another sleight of hand. 'Communalism' as most laymen understand the term, and as some scholars suppose it to have existed for centuries, refers to the atmos-

⁶ Robb's suggestion that 'increased assertiveness [among tenants] and subsequent discontent could be expressed against Muslims even more easily than against landlords' (ibid., p. 189; see also p. 183) is scarcely helpful in this regard. Nor does the idea of a 'false consciousness', as used for instance by Bipan Chandra (*et al.*), *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (Delhi, 1969), p. 38, take us very far: whatever its value in other contexts, it tells us nothing here of the character and potentialities of existing consciousness.

phere of suspicion, fear and ill-will that has come to characterize relations on the ground between different religious communities, and especially between Hindus and Muslims. Most academic investigations of the phenomenon have, on the other hand, been concerned with organized political movements based on the so-called common demands of a religious community, usually in opposition to a real or imagined threat from another community (or communities): sectional demands on state policy for a given share in jobs, education, legislative bodies, leading on in some cases to separatist demands for the creation of new provinces and states. Often investigations of politics at this level have been conducted in quite remarkable isolation from happenings at the grass-roots level. The result, when it comes to an explanation of popular support for such movements, is all too often a retreat into well-worn and essentially tautological formulae—the religious character of the mass of the people, or the monolithic unity of faith: assertions that are not demonstrable by reference to any historical data, if not an uncritical reproduction of old stereotypes.⁷

I propose in this essay to take a close look at the sectarian strife that grew out of the Cow-Protection agitation in the Bhojpuri region, in order to re-examine some of the received wisdom regarding 'communalism' on the ground. A detailed analysis of all the major outbreaks that occurred in the region is not possible here. The following pages focus particularly on the clashes of 1893 in Azamgarh and the adjacent districts of Ghazipur and Ballia, and in Shahaba^d a quarter of a century later. The riots in these overwhelmingly agricultural districts were more evidently 'rural' in character than even the 1912-13 clashes in Faizabad-Ayodhya (which, like Banaras city, had been the scene of major sectarian outbreaks earlier in the nineteenth century). Their scale was also greater than anything that occurred in northern India in 1912-13 (and, incidentally, far greater than that of the more frequently discussed 1913 riot in Kanpur, further west in UP). One of the aims of the present exercise is to locate the identity and interests of the different social groups in the Bhojpuri region involved in this sectarian strife from the late 1880s to the 1910s. However, it has yet another object which is often not pursued far enough in studies of this kind: that is, to consider how struggles between (and within) castes and classes that are divided over many

⁷ Cf. Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India 1916-28* (Delhi, 1979), p. 19, for the unity of all Muslims; Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 213, 245 for the use of some colonial stereotypes.

different issues took on a sectarian form. What we need to know far more about, it seems to me, are the circumstances in which large sections of one religious community united around a particular demand or symbol to take up arms against their neighbours, and the social and geographical area over which this 'unity' was established at different times.

I *The Bhojpuri Economy and Society: A Necessary Background*

Three features of Bhojpuri society call for special notice in the context of the present enquiry. First, it stood out, even in an overwhelmingly agricultural country, for its extreme dependence on pasture and agriculture. Second, it was marked by the clear dominance of a few landowning communities. Finally, it experienced in the colonial period, in common with most of the subcontinent, a severe dislocation of existing social and economic relations.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, over 80 per cent of the Bhojpuri work force was engaged in agriculture and a mere 5 per cent or so in manufacturing. In Banaras Division, which Banaras city and its attendant industries made the most 'industrialized' in the region, agriculture still accounted for 70 per cent of the work force, manufacturing for about 10 per cent. Again, Patna Division—comprising the districts of Shahabad, Gaya and Patna—had 20 towns and 5.5 million inhabitants in 1911, but only 26 industrial works employing less than 3,000 people.⁸

Excluding Banaras, the central Bhojpuri belt here under examination was quite bereft of cities. Only one other town had a population exceeding 40,000 in 1911 (Chapra, headquarters of Saran district); three others had between 30,000 and 40,000 (Mirzapur, Jaunpur and Arrah, headquarters of Shahabad district); and there were two more with over 20,000 (Ghazipur, and Sassaram or Sahasram in Shahabad district): towns that had developed around trade, handicrafts and pilgrimage, and whose importance was maintained by their adoption as centres of colonial administration. There was a handful of other sizeable urban and semi-urban concentrations such as the weaving

⁸ J. Krishnamurthy, 'Changes in the Occupational Structure of the Indian Union, 1901-61' (forthcoming). The figures for Patna division would of course be still more startling if Patna city was excluded. These figures, and the information and statistics contained in the following paragraphs are taken from the 1911 and 1921 census reports for UP and Bihar, the District Gazetteers compiled in the first decades of this century and a number of district Settlement Reports.

towns of Tanda (in Faizabad district) and Mau and Mubarakpur (in Azamgarh) with populations of 19,378, 16,751 and 12,562 respectively in 1911 : places once noted for industry, commerce and imperial favour that now found themselves in far more uncertain circumstances. Most 'urban' complexes in the region, however, were very much smaller centres of artisanal industry and trade, rural market towns (*qasbas*), or large villages classified as towns for reasons of administrative convenience. Even district headquarters like Arrah, Ballia and Azamgarh retained the appearance of clusters of villages, distinguishable from surrounding 'rural' habitations chiefly by the presence of civil courts and officials and the range of services that came in their wake.

A number of the older towns still bore the mark of their special circumstances in time past, with their large communities of weavers and other artisans, long established houses of traders and moneylenders and service groups of various kinds: clerks, agents, priests and preachers. Many of them also had significant concentrations of Muslims, traditionally prominent in the literate service section as well as in crafts such as weaving. Thus in Shahabad, the Muslim proportion of the total population (taking Sheikhs, Pathans, Julahas and so on, all together) was a mere 7 per cent, the lowest in all Bihar, but Muslims were present in somewhat greater strength in the southern part of the district around Sassaram, where the Afghan Emperor of Delhi, Sher Shah Suri had been born: in Sassaram subdivision they constituted a little under 9 per cent of the population, in Sassaram *thana* (or police circle) nearly 12 per cent and in Sassaram town as much as 40 per cent. In Azamgarh, where the Muslim concentration was greater than anywhere else in the Bhojpuri region, they still accounted for no more than 14 per cent of the total population of the district; however, Muslims formed the majority in the towns of Mau, Mubarakpur and Muhammadabad and a substantial minority in Kopaganj, Chiriakot, Azamgarh and several other places.

In the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century more and more people crowded into some of these old towns and the newer trading and administrative centres, as long-distance trade grew, the general monetization of the economy developed further, pressure upon the land increased, and Western education and the colonial administration penetrated deeper. Among them were merchants and moneylenders, men in search of casual labour or other employment, and, most noticeable of all, a whole new breed of petty bureaucrats,

teachers, lawyers and other 'representatives' ready to take up a variety of causes and act as intermediaries between the people and the colonial power. It bears emphasizing, however, that these men retained strong links with the land. For land (and the disputes over its possession, payment of rent and revenue, and the like) provided the merchants, moneylenders, lawyers and others not only with their respective means of livelihood and their clientele, but also in some cases with an additional income derived from the agricultural produce of their family's holdings and of course, in many instances, with status based on the very fact of ownership.

Land remained in any event the primary economic resource, and the struggle for various rights in the produce of the soil forms the backdrop to much of the history of the region. Here, over a period of centuries, communities of Rajputs, Bhumiars ('cultivating' Brahmans, also called Bhumiars Brahmans or Babhans), and Brahmans had established a clear dominance. In more recent times they had had to vie for control over particular villages and estates with various Muslim groups, local converts as well as newcomers from outside, who from time to time sought the intervention of different Muslim rulers in their favour. Conflicts of this kind between these and other groups continued well into the nineteenth century. Muslim zamindars still had a hold on isolated tracts, especially in the vicinity of the old centres of Muslim administration such as Sassaram in southern Shahabad and various places in Azamgarh, Ghazipur and Jaunpur. In the eastern half of the Bhojpuri region—eastern Ghazipur, Ballia, Saran, Shahabad, as also in Gaya, marked by a striking numerical preponderance of the cowherd caste of Ahirs or Gwalas—the Ahirs controlled a fair number of villages, especially those of smaller than average size. Even so, as late as 1951, by which time landowners from several lower-status groups like the Ahirs, Kurmis and even Koeris had emerged in some strength in Bihar, the three 'traditional' upper-caste zamindari communities still accounted for 80 per cent of all landowners in the state.⁹

⁹ N. Sengupta, 'Caste as an Agrarian Phenomenon in Twentieth Century Bihar', in A. Das and V. Nilakant (eds), *Agrarian Relations in India* (Delhi, 1979), p. 86. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey*, vol. V, pt II, p. 42; and J. E. Schwartzberg, 'Caste Regions of the North Indian Plain', in M. Singer and B. S. Cohn (eds), *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago, 1968) establish the difference between 'western' and 'eastern' (or 'standard') Bhojpur: the latter also indicates the caste distribution and the dominance of Rajputs and other upper castes.

The economic dominance of Rajputs, Brahmans and Bhumihars was reinforced by their numerical strength. While the Chamars and Ahirs greatly outnumbered them in western Bhojpur, centring on Azamgarh, and the Ahirs again in the districts further east, the Rajputs and Brahmans and, to a more limited extent the Bhumihars, were present in significant numbers throughout the Bhojpuri region. We may take the figures for Azamgarh and Shahabad again as an illustration. In the former, Chamars constituted over 20 per cent of the total population in 1911, and Ahirs another 19 per cent. But the next most numerous castes were the Brahmans and Rajputs, each forming nearly 9 per cent of the total, and accounting together with the Bhumihars (2 per cent) for a substantial segment of the district population. The other numerically significant Hindu castes were the Koeris and Lunias (or Noniyas, the traditional salt and saltpetre manufacturers), each of whom provided about 4 per cent of the total population. In 1921, Ahirs made up over 13 per cent of the population of Shahabad district. Brahmans and Rajputs came next, with 10 per cent each, and Bhumihars provided another 4 per cent. Koeries here constituted nearly 8 per cent of the total population and Chamars nearly 7 per cent.

All this is fairly well known. What is perhaps less appreciated is the extent to which the Rajput, Bhumihar and Brahman communities of the Bhojpuri region were communities of smallholders. The Permanent Settlement which covered much of the tract, and the existence of great landlords like the Rajas of Banaras and Dumraon, Hathwa and Bettiah, have tended to obscure the pattern of land control at the local level. 'In Bihar', Baden-Powell wrote in 1892, 'there never were any large Zamindaris': and whatever the validity of this assessment for Bihar as a whole it would appear to have been true in large part for the Bhojpuri region at the turn of the century. And as the same authority noted, in the permanently-settled portion of east UP, which included Ghazipur, Ballia, Banaras, Jaunpur and part of Azamgarh, the Raja of Banaras who might have been designated 'landlord of the whole' was, by agreement, set aside, and the settlement was made with village zamindars, 'i.e. the landlord or joint villages (some of them bhaiachara communities ...)'.¹⁰

¹⁰ B. H. Baden-Powell, *Land Systems of British India*, vol. I (1892; Delhi reprint, 1974), p. 441 and vol. II (1974), p. 6; G. McDonald, 'Unity on Trial: Congress in Bihar 1929-39', in D. A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj* (Delhi, 1977), p. 293. Cf. J.R. Hagen and Anand Yang, 'Local Sources for the Study of Rural India: The "Village Notes" of Bihar', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, XIII: 1 (1976), p. 77 for preponderance of petty zamindars in Saran.

There were indeed variations between and within districts. Sometimes the headman or representative was treated as the principal with his co-sharers as inferiors. In places the overlordship established over village communities by subordinate chiefs, courtiers or relations of a more or less distant ruler was acknowledged. More generally, however, the collective spirit of these proprietary and cultivating bodies was recognized in the settlements. As Crawford commented on Azamgarh in 1908,

The district is essentially one of large communities of peasant proprietors. Apart from those definitely recorded as so held, many of the mahals owned by single large proprietors or their descendants were acquired at sales for arrears of revenue in the early days of British rule, and in these the old peasant proprietors will be found in possession of the bulk of the land as occupancy tenants.¹¹

His observation neglects the appeal of zamindari (or rather, rentier) status for the upper castes, the importance of never soiling their hands with the messy business of cultivation. But it does point to a factor of significance for the region as a whole: that differentiation within these communities was not especially marked, and Rajput, Brahman, Bhumihar zamindars or occupancy tenants (including actual peasant proprietors) were not easily distinguished in terms of income, status or style of life. While the very insistence on 'gentry' status inhibited the emergence of what has been called 'true *bhaiachara*',¹² the low level of differentiation (and possibly a sense of allegiance to the great landlords of their stock, Dumraon, Banaras and others) seems to have lent a degree of cohesiveness to these communities, which were otherwise without strict caste panchayats or regulations—a cohesiveness that was evident in this region in 1857 as it was to be again during the cow-protection activities of the 1890s and the 1910s.

If the Rajputs, Brahmans and Bhumihars are readily identified as the zamindari castes of the Bhojpuri region, the Ahirs, Kurmis and

¹¹ C. E. Crawford, *Final Report on the 7th Settlement of the Azamgarh District of the United Provinces*, 1908 (Allahabad, 1908), p. 10. Cf. also B.S. Cohn, 'The Initial British Impact on India: A Case Study of the Benares Region', *Journal of Asian Studies* XIX (1959-60); and 'Structural Change in Indian Rural Society 1596-1885', in R.E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Wisconsin, 1969).

¹² E. Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 88.

Koeris may be categorized as the tenant and cultivating castes *par excellence*, and the still further depressed and untouchable castes (especially the Chamars and the Dusadhs) as the main providers of menial and agricultural labour. But while we make these distinctions between upper, middle and low-status groups—and, more or less correspondingly, between the classes of small landlords and rich peasants, middle peasants, and poor peasants and landless labourers—we must bear in mind the distinctions made by the members of the local society themselves. Apart from the rigorously observed distinctions between a whole variety of castes and subcastes (Muslim as well as Hindu), the basic social division in the region as perceived at least by the locally dominant elements, was that between the *sharif* (or *ashraf*, i.e. the respectable classes) and the *razil* (or labouring people). The former comprised the Brahmans, Rajputs, Bhumihars, together with the 'true' Syeds and Sheikhs, Pathan converts from the Rajput community, and some smaller Hindu castes like the Kayasths. All the rest—from the Ahirs and Kurmis, and their opposite numbers among the Muslims such as the Zamindaras (or Rautaras) of Azamgarh, to the 'unclean' labouring and artisanal castes, Koeries, Chamars, Julahas and the like—were classified as *razil*.

One indicator of a community's *razil* status was the fact that a far larger proportion of its women went out to work than among the *sharif*. Thus in Bihar in 1911, whereas there were but 8 female workers to every 100 male workers among the Babhans, 10 to every 100 among Rajputs and 12 among the Brahmans, the numbers were 52 among the Kurmis, 54 among both Ahirs and Koeris, and as much as 69 and 71 among the Julahas and Dusadhs respectively. Other indicators might be sought in practices like widow remarriage, the consumption of liquor, possibly meat-eating and, not the least significant, the performance of menial and other tasks for the upper castes and landowners. *Sharif* status carried with it at least a marginal concession in the rates of rented land, for example. But it is worth noting that it was the implication of social inferiority in the term *razil* rather than the disadvantage in rent that appears especially to have aroused the resentment of certain of the lower orders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹³ With the advance of

¹³ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 14; D. L. Drake-Brockman, *Azamgarh District Gazetteer* (Allahabad, 1911), p. 115; L.S.S. O'Malley, *Census of India, 1911*, vol. V, *Bengal, Bihar & Orissa, & Sikkim*, part I (Calcutta, 1913), pp. 576-80.

impersonal market forces, bureaucratic procedures and law courts, many of these resentments were to burst forth in the form of social mobility movements for caste uplift and the assertion of self-respect in the face of zamindari (and, more generally, *sharif*) oppression.

On the one hand, the extension of cash-cropping and trade, and the registration of the rights of various classes on the land, provided favourable conditions of advancement for many individuals and groups. On the other hand, a century of forced commercialization of agriculture, violent fluctuations in the conditions of trade, and the general trend of de-industrialization in the region combined with the closing of other important sources of subsidiary income such as service in the native armies and courts and the growth of population, greatly increased the pressure on large sections of the agricultural community.¹⁴ The zamindari communities of the Bhojpuri region were among the first to feel the effects; and many of their number, unable to relinquish old ways and customs, became the victims of an age that required personal supervision (if not cultivation) of smaller and smaller shares in the land.

Eyre, Sub-Divisional Officer of Sassaram tahsil in Shahabad district, noted as early as 1871-2 that the local 'gentry' 'has of late years so increased in number, that though the pride of those who constitute it is unlimited, the poorer among them are compelled by sheer necessity to resort to manual labour. ...' From Azamgarh in 1908, Crawford reported some of the same pressures at work—'the most obvious

¹⁴ I do not refer in these footnotes to the general literature on the economic consequences of colonialism in India, social mobility and Sanskritization, or 'communalism', all of which is fairly well-known. But specifically for the Bhojpuri region, cf. A. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Change in a Northern Indian State. UP 1819-33* (Oxford, 1973); E. Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India*, vol. I: *UP under British Rule, 1860-1900* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1971); C.A. Bayly, 'Town Building in North India 1790-1830', *Modern Asian Studies*, 9, 4 (1975), and 'The Age of Hiatus: North Indian Economy and Society 1830-50', in C.H. Phillips and M.D. Wainright (eds), *Indian Society and the Beginnings of Modernisation* (London, 1976); A.K. Bagchi, 'De-industrialization in Gangetic Bihar 1809-1901', in *Essays in Honour of Prof. S.C. Sarkar* (Delhi, 1978); G. Pandey, 'Economic Dislocation in Nineteenth Century Eastern UP: Some Implications of the Decline of Artisanal Industry in Colonial India' (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, Occasional Paper no. 37, May 1981). For the loss of opportunities in military service to Kurmis and Rajputs, see N. Sengupta, 'Caste ... in Twentieth Century Bihar', p. 85; W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. XII, *Districts of Gaya and Shahabad* (London, 1877), p. 223.

characteristic of the proprietors of this district is their number'—and their apparently inevitable consequences: separation and subdivision of estates and holdings, and a 'lamentable amount' of litigation. In the thirty years that had elapsed since the last settlement of Azamgarh district, he found, nearly all the 'traditional' landowning communities had lost land : Rajputs 16,000 acres, Bhumihars 21,000, Kayasths 13,000 and Pathans 10,000. Meanwhile 'trading castes' picked up 32,000 acres and the Zamindaras, a middle-ranking Muslim agricultural caste, 19,000 acres. Even after this, Rajputs owned one-third of the district, the 'trading castes' less than one-sixteenth.¹⁵ Yet for thousands of *sharif* families, the hardship must have been severe. There is no doubt that increasing pressure on the soil, rising prices, and the danger of losing rights long enjoyed through administrative fiat or economic collapse, sharpened the contests between zamindars, occupancy tenants and others that came to mark Survey and Settlement proceedings throughout these districts in this period. Without doubt, too, these straitened circumstances contributed to the growing trend of young men from zamindari families migrating to the cities and towns in search of employment.

The economic dislocation that came with colonialism did not of course affect the rentier classes alone. Increased dependence on the market in a generally inflationary era, the strong position of the moneylender—*mahajan* (often himself the zamindar) and the buying or swallowing up of all kinds of rights in land (cultivated as well as waste), all this enforced by a rigorous and powerful bureaucratic authority, subjected the lower classes to enormous stress. The vast majority of the labouring and cultivating communities, lacking ready access to the new economic and cultural resources, and increasingly denied the benefits of earlier forms of personal contact and mutual obligation, found themselves extremely hard-pressed. One reflection of this pressure was the development of a new trail of migration. This was no longer the migration of villages or communities, 'voting with their feet' and taking up cultivation or other employment in other areas. The migration that now occurred, to the industrial belt of eastern India, the tea-gardens of Assam and plantations abroad, was the forced migration of individuals, predominantly single men: in most cases it retained something of a 'temporary'

¹⁵ *Loc. cit.*; Crawford, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

character about it, bringing with it an additional income but also new strains to the local communities, without fundamentally transforming their work situation or dependence on other classes.

I have tried to document this elsewhere in the case of the weavers of eastern UP and to show something of their resistance to what they saw as the increasing oppressiveness of the age.¹⁶ But it was among the middle-status agricultural castes (or caste clusters), who could as easily ascend to a higher status and greater economic and political freedom as sink under pressure into the ranks of the increasingly impoverished and dependent elements, that the newly developing tensions within Bhojpuri society were most clearly reflected. Along with the Zamindaras of Azamgarh whose gains in landholding in the thirty years preceding the Settlement of 1908 have been noted above, there were, for instance, the Mals, 'a Kurmi caste of some importance' in pargana Nathupur of the same district. In their improved circumstances, the Zamindaras and the Mals became extremely resentful of the low esteem in which they were held by the higher orders, and resisted attempts to classify them as *razil*. In much the same way, the Sainthwar subcaste of the Kurmis claimed (and won for itself at the Census of 1911) the status of a separate caste, not associated with the rest of the Kurmis, 'chiefly because of the rise of its leading family [of Padrauna in Gorakhpur]'.¹⁷

By the first decades of the twentieth century, indeed, several of these middle-status agricultural castes—Ahirs, Kurmis, Koeris and others—had begun to register their protest far more openly against all manner of social and economic oppression. Their agitations appear to have gained a clearer focus and organizational form with the attempt of the 1901 Census to list castes according to precedence. Bhumi-hars and Kayasths were indignant at their classification in the Vaishya *varna* along with such lowly castes as Kurmis, Ahirs, Mallahs (boatmen), Hajjams (barbers) and Kahars (water-carriers). Ahirs and Kurmis, too, especially the more prosperous among them, protested against being placed on a par with Hajjams and Kahars.¹⁸ Here was a

¹⁶ G. Pandey, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 14; Drake-Brockman, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-9, 115; E.A.H. Blunt, *Census of India, 1911*, vol. XV, *United Provinces of Agra & Oudh*, part I (Allahabad, 1912), p. 352.

¹⁸ Sengupta, 'Caste as an Agrarian Phenomenon', pp. 85-9; *Bihar Census 1911*, pt. I, pp. 440, 444, 466, and *passim*.

powerful stimulus to the formation of modern, provincewide and even countrywide caste associations and the development of broader solidarities.

To indicate the nature and force of these caste movements, we may take the single example of the Gwala Movement among the Ahirs of Shahabad and other districts in Bihar, which is of interest also because it was closely associated with cow-protection activities in that region. The Bihar Census Commissioner in 1921 described this as the most important of the lower-caste associations and movements for social uplift that had arisen in Bihar.

Sessions are held once a year and are attended by several thousands of persons.... A considerable body of literature has accumulated in support of the claim of the Ahirs to Kshatriya origin and it is stated that 'nothing less than Kshatriya position will satisfy it [the community]'. . . a number of Ahirs have [*sic*] assumed the sacred thread . . . The men of this caste refuse to do *Begari* [forced labour] for their landlords or to permit their women folk to attend the markets to sell milk and ghee.

Another report, from the Patna Division, noticed various instructions that the Gwalas had laid down for their community at a succession of meetings. These included the wearing of the sacred thread, the herding of cows, an end to the practice of early marriage, a collection of one anna per bigha from all Gwala cultivators to be utilized for the education of the children, the refusal to perform *begar* for zamindars, and the maintenance of unity among themselves.¹⁹ It is appropriate perhaps to add one more word about the special concern for cows expressed by this traditional cowherd caste. With increasing numbers of cattle passing into the hands of butchers (through cattle-stealing and poisoning, and by other means) and mortality among cattle at a height from the later nineteenth century (this, again, associated in part with a declining acreage reserved for pasture), and with the great cattle fairs of western Bihar reflecting these trends beyond doubt,²⁰

¹⁹ Hetakur Jha, 'Lower-Caste Peasants and Upper-Caste Zamindars in Bihar 1921-25', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, XIV, 4 (1977), pp. 550 and 555.

²⁰ *Selections from the Records of the Government of India. Home, Revenue and Agricultural Department, No. CLXXX. Papers Relating to the Crime of Cattle-Poisoning* (Calcutta, 1881), p. 17 ff; *Report on the Scarcity and Relief Operations in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh during the years 1877-78 and 1879* (Allahabad, 1880) p. 10; *Govt. of India. Revenue and Agriculture Department, December 1888. Famine Progs. Reports on the Condition of the Lower Classes of Population of India*, Progs 1-24, Letter no. 663, Offg Commr Faizabad-Director Land Records and Agriculture, North-Western Provinces and Oudh, 4 April 1888, which indicates that

the protection and care of cows became a matter of much importance for the Gwalas. The implications of this for sectarian relations in the area will become clearer in a later section.

Here it must be noted that among Muslims, too, attempts to reject some of the traditional symbols of socio-cultural degradation and assert a higher Islamic status by contrast, proceeded apace at this time. The Zamindaras claimed a berth among the *ashraf*. Between 1901 and 1911 Muslim Rajputs in large numbers 'suddenly' took to calling themselves Pathans—the title Singh yielding place to Khan. 'Practically all ... [Muslims] of low degree', weavers, oil-pressers, barbers and so on, aspired to the status of Sheikhs 'though the better class Musalmans would not recognise them, nor would they recognise each other, as such'. Muslim weavers over much of north India, with their closely knit community organization and recent history of common hardships and extended struggle, succeeded in having the name Julaha, with its connotations of lowly origin and foolishness, removed from the official record, and were registered instead as Momin (the faithful, men of honour), Ansari (after a claimed Arabic ancestor who practised the art of weaving), Momin-Ansar or Sheikh-Momin.²¹

Movements for social mobility do not seem in this period to have been as closely linked with changes in occupation as was perhaps the case before.²² Improved communications and long-distance mobility, and the very efforts of the new colonial patron to record the 'traditional' status of his subjects, encouraged their growth. In part, as well, such efforts at self-purification and upward mobility reflected the response of Hindus and Muslims at many different levels to the powerful movements of religious reform and revivalism in the nineteenth century. Again, as the evidence suggests, these were to some extent the product of the threat to a traditional sense of community that was very strong, for instance, among Muslim weavers in different parts of the Bhojpuri region, only a little less so among local groups

Ahirs are now being pressed into debt servitude. See also A. K. Bagchi, 'Reflections on Patterns of Regional Growth in India during the period of British Rule', *Bengal Past and Present* XCV, pt. 1, no. 180 (1976), p. 265; Robb, op. cit., p. 183; McLane, op. cit., p. 303.

²¹ *UP Census 1911*, pt. I, p. 360; *Bihar Census 1911*, pt. I, p. 446; G. Pandey, op. cit.

²² Cf. Hitesranjan Sanyal, *Social Mobility in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1981).

of Ahirs and Kurmis and more diffuse, it would seem, among Bhumihars and Brahmans: a more or less desperate search for economic and social alternatives in a situation where earlier and hitherto well understood functions, relations and systems of relief were breaking down.

It was in the midst of these emerging tensions and struggles that a number of newly organized 'communal' demands were injected into the Bhojpuri region. Schemes to set up Hindu and Muslim educational institutions and to have Devanagari recognized as a script for official purposes found a following among petty bourgeois and zamindari elements of both the religious denominations in urban areas, although the vigour with which they were advocated in the eastern region apparently fell short of that in the Punjab and in western UP. The call for Cow-Protection of course spread further, encompassed a wider social spectrum and gave rise to very serious disturbances in east UP and west Bihar. However, it will be wrong to assume before actually entering into an examination of the strife we have taken up for study, that there was anything like a ready-made 'communalism' or simple 'unity of faith' to answer for all the newly fabricated 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' demands throughout Bhojpuri society. Even for the relatively isolated and embattled Muslim community of the region at the turn of the century, the outlook was rather more complex, as the following extract from the diary of a local weaver testifies. Abdul Majid of Mubarakpur (Azamgarh district) thus records his observations on a riot in the town in 1904:

The riot in Mubarakpur was a strange affair. It occurred at the instance of the notables [*bade log*, literally, big men]. The lower classes [*chote log*, literally, small or unprivileged people] thought that nothing would happen [*sic*] because of official precautions. If the latter had known that they would in their haste commit excesses and be punished for them, they would certainly never have taken such action. The head of a pig was found at ... *masjid* near the pond in the Sikhthi zamindari [one of the three zamindari units that went to make up Mubarakpur]. The Musalmans became extremely agitated. They did not stop to consider who was responsible for this act. The planting of this pig's head in the *masjid* was the work of Khuda Bakhsh ... of Mustafabad [a hamlet near Mubarakpur]. He performed this shameful deed because of his enmity with Babu Ram Bali Singh of Gujarpar [zamindar of this Hindu village just north of Mubarakpur]. He decided to defile the mosque and then get the Musalmans of Mubarakpur to believe that Ram Bali had done it: thereafter he would

withdraw, and yet obtain his revenge on Ram Bali. However, things turned out very differently, and the Musalmans of Mubarakpur began to be arrested from 5 p.m. on that very day The Police were posted all around. The houses of those accused who had absconded were searched. Inspector Mohan Singh, *daroga* Dost Muhammad Khan, and ten or twelve policemen and *chaukidars* entered and searched the house of Maulvi Rafiuddin Sahib in Pura Dewan. They threw a copy of the Qoran Majid out into the courtyard, and Mohan Singh trampled it underfoot. We were present there, and were deeply wounded by this sight . . .²³

This certainly testifies to the depth of religious sentiment, undiminished yet by the advance of an industrial age or scientific education. There is at the same time an appreciation here of the different interests of the well-to-do (*zamindars* and *bade log*) and the poorer classes (*chote log*), as well as the power of the colonial state. Here is also a feeling of contrition at the action taken by the Muslims of the town against the local Hindus in an unstudied response to a self-interested person's attempt to exploit their religious sentiments. All this in spite of the bitter experience of the Cow-Protection movement and the tension and conflict between Hindus and Muslims in the district that flowed from it, of which the 1904 riot too seems to have been a part. The manipulative politics of 'communalism' appears as only one of several possibilities in this situation.

II *Baqr-Id, 1893*

The Baqr-Id of 25 June 1893 was marked in the Bhojpuri region by riots of an unusual kind, which were very different in character from earlier instances of localized strife. Azamgarh district, the chief arena of battle, was, in the official phrase, 'invaded' by men from other districts.

Of 35 cases of unlawful assembly and rioting [in Azamgarh] nearly all were the work of large bodies of excited Hindus, who had collected from distant villages and from the Ballia and Ghazipur districts to join in an attempt to prevent the Muhammadans exercising their lawful custom of sacrifice. . . . On the day of the 'Id excited bodies of Hindus wandered round the district demanding, under threats of injury to person and property, the prompt surrender of the cattle destined for sacrifice, and requiring from them an agreement that they would abstain from the

²³ Entry headed Sunday, 29 May 1904. (The late Mr Abdul Majid's diary is preserved by his family in Mubarakpur. I am most grateful to Qazi Atahar Mubarakpuri for invaluable help in reading this Urdu manuscript.)

sacrifice of kine in the future. On the days following the 'Id the crops of several Musalmans who were believed to have performed sacrifice were destroyed.²⁴

The worst trouble spot in Azamgarh was Mau, an old cloth-manufacturing centre known since the days of Akbar for the production of particular kinds of cloth. In Shah Jahan's reign the pargana of Maunath Bhanjan was assigned to two daughters of the Emperor, and the town was renamed Jahanabad after one of them : very soon it came to have as many as 84 *mohallas* (residential localities) and 360 mosques. Then, and down to the nineteenth century, a large proportion of the population consisted of Muslim weavers and Hindu spinners, traders and businessmen of various castes, many of whom had been induced by the imperial authorities to come and settle in the town. The cotton cloth industry gained greatly in importance, and the subsequent establishment of an imperial customs post at Mau indicates the volume of traffic that passed through it.

The town of Mau and the surrounding tract appears to have been held for long, again from Akbar's time if not earlier, by Sheikh Muslim zamindars. The latter were, however, displaced at some stage by Dhoonwar Rajput landowners. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Dhoonwars were still extending their hold in the countryside around Mau, chiefly now at the expense of other Rajput proprietors.²⁵ The situation in the town when the British took over the direct administration of eastern UP in 1801 might appear, then, to have been tailor-made for conflict between Hindus and Muslims, with Hindu zamindars, traders and moneylenders in the ascendant in an area where a majority of the inhabitants were Muslims with a memory of imperial favour and local Muslim dominance. And it is notable that clashes over the issue of cow-slaughter, not unknown in Mau before, broke out again in the nineteenth century long before the advent of the Gaurakshini Sabhas. Yet, as we shall see, many other memories as well as institutions and arrangements had to be

²⁴ India Office Library and Records, *East India (Religious Disturbances) 'Copies or Extracts of Reports relating to the recent Conflicts between Hindus and Muhammedans in India, and particularly to the causes which led to them'* (London, 1894)—hereafter *East India Religious Disturbances, 1894*—Chief Secy Govt of N.W.P. & O. to Secy Home Dept, Govt of India, 28 Aug. 1893, p. 20.

²⁵ J.R. Reid, *Report on the Settlement Operations in the District of Azamgarh* (Allahabad, 1881), p. 146; J. Thomason, *Report on the Settlement of Chuklah Azim-gurb* (Agra, 1837), p. 137; G. Pandey, *op. cit.*

disturbed before the town was engulfed by more extended and, as it would then be described, endemic sectarian strife.

In any case, it was not the town of Mau alone but the entire southern and eastern portion of Azamgarh district, bordering on the districts of Ghazipur and Ballia, which was deeply affected by the new call for cow-protection. In these parganas the impact of Gaurakshini propaganda, vigorously promoted in Ghazipur and Ballia for some years before this, was already becoming evident at the beginning of 1893. Thus on 9 January 1893, a few miles from Kopaganj (Azamgarh's third largest weaving centre situated six miles north of Mau), villagers 'rescued' a herd of cattle being driven by Muslim butchers via Kopa to Ghazipur. The next morning the police recovered the cattle at the nearby village of Kasara, to be confronted by a crowd of perhaps two hundred Hindus—people from Kasara and other neighbouring villages—who took back the cattle by force and then dispatched them to their associates in various parts of Ballia.²⁶

Such demonstrations against intended (or even possible) cow-slaughter increased in the months that followed and especially after formal steps were initiated to organize Gaurakshini Sabhas in the district in May 1893. Two large meetings in that month at Azmatgarh and Jahanaganj, attended by several thousand Hindus and addressed by Gaurakshini leaders from Ballia, marked the beginning of this effort. The second of these meetings put forward the demand that Muslims should give up *qurbani* (cow-sacrifice) and apparently also decided on direct action to put an end to the practice.²⁷

Three days after the Jahanaganj meeting, on 22 May, at Sikandarpur village near Maharajganj, a crowd of several hundred Hindus deprived a Muslim of a buffalo that he was taking along for a wedding feast. A week later butchers driving buffaloes along the road were stopped and threatened by Hindu villagers somewhere between Mubarakpur and the town of Azamgarh. During the same period, tenants of the Muslim zamindars of Walidpur (near Mubarakpur) and certain

²⁶ Azamgarh Collectorate English Record Room, Dept XIII, File 146 of 1894, Letter No.45/XIII 146, Magistrate Azamgarh to Commissioner Gorakhpur, 19 Jan. 1893; *East Indian Religious Disturbances, 1894*, 18ff.

²⁷ The information in this and the succeeding paragraph comes from loc.cit and India Office Records, L/P & J/6/357, Dupernex, Offg Magistrate Azamgarh to Commissioner Gorakhpur, 7 July 1893 (hereafter Dupernex's Report).

Muslims of Muhammadabad instituted a number of cases, some of them fabricated, regarding Gaurakshini activities in Walidpur and the forcible confiscation of cattle by Hindus near Muhammadabad. As a Hindu Inspector of Police reported at this time, after the Jahanaganj meeting Hindus in many different parts of the district had prevented Muslims from purchasing not only cattle, but buffaloes and goats as well, and friction between Hindus and Muslims had increased enormously.

At the same time branches of the Cow-Protection League sprang up in various places. These quickly acquired for themselves a powerful position in parganas Sagri (especially its north-eastern portions, Ghosi and Nathupur, which bordered on Ballia district) and Muhammadabad (in which Mau and Mubarakpur lay), and spread out to much of pargana Nizamabad (west of Azamgarh town) and the parts of pargana Deogaon that bordered on Muhammadabad and Nizamabad.

Among the methods adopted by the Gaurakshini Sabhas for the raising of funds was the system of *chutki*, whereby a pinch (or *chutki*) of food was set aside for each member of a household at each meal: this was then collected for the village as a whole and passed on along a chain of selected officers of the Sabha, with the proceeds from its sale being deposited with a Treasurer. 'Wherever "chutki" is collected,' the Azamgarh Magistrate at the time of the 1893 riots observed, 'I regard the League as being in force.' In the Sagri pargana, *chutki* collections were said to have been 'in full swing ever since the meeting at Azmatgarh' on 15 May 1893. In the Nathupur division they began even earlier, apparently in January or February: by the middle of the year it was reported that 'chutki is collected in every Hindu village in Nathupur'. In Muhammadabad, too, the Gaurakshinists proved very successful: so much so indeed that in drawing up a list of the chief organizers of the Sabhas in the district, the Magistrate found it unnecessary to include anyone from Mau and its neighbourhood since 'every leading Hindu in those parts sympathizes and aids in the movement'.²⁸

The Cow-Protection movement had advanced rapidly from its

²⁸ Loc.cit, 'Appendix on the Ramifications of the Gaurakshini Sabha in the Azamgarh District'. This account of the Gaurakshini Organization is based on the above, and India Office Records, L/P & J/3/96, 'Note on the Agitation against Cow-killing', section on 'Organization of the Gauraksha Sabhas'.

initial aim of building *gaushalas*, or homes for sick and aged cattle. By the time it had penetrated into Azamgarh, its leaders were pressing for the impounding of cattle found on the roads in 'suspicious' circumstances, and the collection of fees for cattle so impounded at rates to be fixed by zamindars and utilized for the promotion of Gaurakshini purposes. In some places the zamindars were arbitrating disputes in which cattle were involved and realizing fines for the benefit of the Sabhas. Moreover, as an official reported,

the whole of the Hindu population is driven into its arms by the tyranny of caste, and when once the league is established in any place, its grasp is so powerful that every man, woman and child must openly or secretly contribute to its funds, or cease to be a Hindu.²⁹

How this system of intimidation worked was demonstrated by an incident in the village of Panda Kunda, which lay in the western portion of the Sagri pargana of Azamgarh district, just before the Baqr-Id of 1893. Here a 'respectable Hindu farmer', Lachman Paure, was 'remorselessly boycotted' for selling a bullock to a Muslim. Gurbin, Niranjan, Maharaj, Debidayal, Bechu, all Sahus (traders or moneylenders), and a number of other men gathered at his house, pulled down tiles from the roof, and smashed his earthen vessels. They also stopped the irrigation of his sugarcane field, forbade the village Kahars from carrying the sweets that were necessary for his daughter's entry into the house of her father-in-law, and slapped Lachman, threatening to loot his house and put him to death if he did not get the bullock back.³⁰

About this time, too, the Sabhas in Azamgarh had begun to demand *iqarnamas* (bonds) from Muslim villagers to the effect that in future they would not slaughter cattle under any condition. Such demands were backed up by various kinds of threat. Muslim weavers were threatened with boycott: no one would buy their cloth, nor any *bania* supply them with grain. Landowning Muslims were warned that their property would be plundered: two of them reported receiving such threats with the qualification that if they contributed to Gaurakshini funds, or gave a certain quantity of *rasad* for the purposes of the Sabhas, they would be spared.

Some of this information regarding the growth of Gaurakshini

²⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁰ Dupernex's Report.

activities, culled from the contemporary official reports, may have been painted in particularly lurid colours after the experience of the riots at the Baqr-Id of 1893. But even before the Baqr-Id there was enough evidence of the aggressiveness of Hindu demands and the general growth of tension for special precautions to have been taken. Among these was the posting of Garstin, the Superintendent of the Azamgarh district police force, and Janki Prasad, a Deputy Magistrate, to the town of Mau on 24 June, the day before the Baqr-Id.³¹ That afternoon, the Deputy Magistrate in fact arranged a compromise agreement between the local Hindu and Muslim leaders. But all through the night of 24 June and the following morning, crowds of Hindus from Ballia and Ghazipur districts as well as places nearer Mau streamed into the town to demonstrate against *qurbani*. Before the day was far advanced a crowd estimated at between 700 and 1,200 had moved forward to attack a party of Muslims in front of the Julaha quarter of Chandpura. The appeals of the officials present were ignored. Both sides were armed, with swords, bows and guns but above all with lathis, some of which had choppers attached to them. Open battle was stopped only by police firing (in which two Hindus were killed) and a chance rainfall.

Yet officials and mounted police had to stand between the parties for the next two hours to prevent a renewal of fighting. Indeed, as soon as the Superintendent of Police rode back to his camp to send a report to the Magistrate, at about 11.30 a.m., the Hindus began a new assault. Strengthened by the arrival of fresh contingents in the meantime, the crowd now closed in upon Chandpura, entered the courtyards of Muslim houses and used their lathis on 'everyone' and 'everything' in sight. Before police firing had forced them to withdraw again, they had accounted for three Muslims who lay dead or dying on the *usar* plain.

The object of the attackers was clear from the start: it was, first, to confiscate all the cows in the possession of the local Muslims that might be intended for sacrifice, and second, to secure from the

³¹ The following account is based on letters and correspondence in *ibid*; Azamgarh Collectorate, Dept XIII, File 146 of 1894; and Gorakhpur Commissioner's Record Room, Dept XVI, File 37 of 1898-1900, particularly Court of Session, Azamgarh District, Trial nos. 30 and 37 of 1893, Queen Empress vs. Gobind Rai and 48 others (Judgement 14 Feb. 1894). For other precautionary steps taken by the Azamgarh officials, see Section VI below.

Muslims an agreement never to sacrifice kine in future. They rejected all efforts made by the officials to arrange a compromise agreement. Eventually local Muslim leaders gave in. The Hindus took possession of six or more cows and obtained a stamped agreement, signed by several Muslims and initialled 'under compulsion' by the Deputy Magistrate and the Tahsildar.

As it happened, some of the crowd, chiefly it appears men from villages around Mau and other places within Azamgarh district, refused to rest content even with this complete acceptance of their demands. As the assembled groups began to disperse, this section headed for another Muslim hamlet of the town and smashed the tiles of houses there. Then a second fight broke out. Most of the Muslims who had taken part in the first battle had by now withdrawn into Chandpura, but some hundred and fifty men had remained outside. This small body was attacked by 'united Hindu forces' from the south and west, and six Muslims, cut off from the main contingent, were beaten to death: one other, seriously wounded in the attack, died subsequently.

Mau was the scene of the most brutal outrages, but it was only one of the places where large Hindu demonstrations occurred at the Baqr-Id of 1893, demonstrations that led in many cases to clashes and violence. The evidence indicates a concerted attack by Hindus from Ballia and Ghazipur upon the Muslims of Mau, Kopa, Ghosi, Chiriakot, all towns and villages within easy reach of the district boundary. Indeed parties from the neighbouring districts found their way even further, to places such as Jahanaganj. On the other hand, local men seem to have been predominant in most of the demonstrations in the interior of the district, such as those at Jianpur, Azmatgarh and Gaurdih. This appears to have also been the case at Mubarakpur, a potential point of explosion which had been the scene of serious Hindu-Muslim riots earlier in the century. Crowds of armed Hindus apparently gathered in the neighbouring villages on the occasion of the Baqr-Id in 1893. However, they did not enter Mubarakpur, possibly on account of the advance preparations made by the local Muslims.

Azamgarh district, and especially the region around Mau, appears to have been chosen by the Gaurakshini leaders of the region as the arena for a trial of strength in 1893. But on a smaller scale examples of demonstrations and clashes, much like those that took place in

Azamgarh, occurred in other districts too. In Ghazipur the Gaurakshinists had long been active in propagating their cause. As long ago as the Baqr-Id of 1888 a great crowd of Hindus, incited by 'the fanatical speeches of one Gopalanand, a member of the Benares Arya Samaj', had collected in Ghazipur town and sought to prevent *qurbani*. The arrest of the 'ring leaders' by the police saved the situation from taking a violent turn. In April 1892 a gang of Hindus attacked the house of a Muslim butcher in village Nonahira and took away a number of cows kept for slaughter. The Baqr-Id of 1893 extended action of this kind over a wider area.³²

Such indeed was the impact of Gaurakshini propaganda in Ghazipur that Hindu villagers came out in strength to prevent the killing of cows in individual cases quite unconnected with the general practice of *qurbani* at the Baqr-Id. Thus on 5 July 1893, at the village of Maupara, two miles from the police station of Nandganj, large numbers of lathi-wielding Hindus gathered to intimidate a Muslim resident, Wazir Ali, who had planned to kill a cow for a wedding feast that evening. The arrival of armed police held the crowd back and at nightfall the crowd withdrew—to return the next morning to renew their demonstration. Thus they succeeded in preventing the slaughter of the cow for the feast. Yet a few days later, on 11 July, three stragglers proceeding to celebrate the wedding at Wazir Ali's were intercepted at Paharpur, a mile from Maupara, by fifteen Hindu villagers armed with lathis. On declaring the object of their visit, the Muslims were attacked: one of them had his arm broken. The assailants were recognized as being among those who had taken part in the demonstration at Maupara.

Potentially the most dangerous of the demonstrations that took place in Ghazipur district at the 'Id of 1893 was the attack on Patiya. There was evidence of elaborate planning here. For some time before the 'Id two local Banias had collected and stored supplies for the provision of the anticipated crowds. Luckily the district authorities, having learnt of the 'determined' preparations being made, arranged for the stationing in the village of an armed police force under Inspector Pollock and for the quick supply of reinforcements which in fact turned out to be necessary. But for these precautions, as

³² For Ghazipur, see *East India Religious Disturbances, 1894*, Enclosure 2 in no. 4, H.B. Finlay, Offg Commr Banaras Division to Chief Secretary, Govt of NWP & O, 16 Oct. 1893.

the Divisional Commissioner put it, 'there is no doubt that the riot at Patiya would have been on the same scale as that at Mau'.³³

But perhaps as significant as the happenings at Patiya* were the events of 26 June in the small village of Khatirpur, no more than a stone's throw away from the police station of Shadiabad. Here, on the day after the Baqr-Id, a crowd of some seven thousand Hindus armed with lathis confronted the handful of Muslim inhabitants and threatened them with dire consequences until they vowed never again to sacrifice a cow.

The call for revenge against Muslims who had performed *qurbani* at the Baqr-Id was indeed widespread in the Bhojpuri districts at this time. We may take one more example, from Kazipur village in Ballia, a district which was otherwise relatively peaceful in 1893, probably because the Ballia Gaurakshini Sabhas were devoting their energies to Azamgarh. Two cows were sacrificed in Kazipur at the house of a Muslim butcher, Mangar. On 26 June, the day after the 'Id, news of the *qurbani* spread in the surrounding areas and the rumour went around that the Kazipur Muslims were likely to perform further sacrifices. By late afternoon that day, a large crowd of Hindus had assembled at the nearby village of Sheikhpur: most of the assembly came from the vicinity, but none, it seems, was from Kazipur. The Muslims of Kazipur sent Ramhit, an old and respected Brahman of their village, to intercede on their behalf and to 'tell the mob [that] our sacrifice is over'. But neither Ramhit's pleas nor the small police force that had arrived by this time, could deter the Hindu crowd. Having hurled a warning brick-bat in the direction of the police, the crowd split up and advanced on Kazipur from different directions. Here they thoroughly ransacked Mangar's house and then dispersed, plundering the houses of several other Muslims (zamindars and others) as they went. Their object was plainly to punish the Muslims for the performance of cow-sacrifice. They appear to have made no enquiries regarding cattle owned by the local Muslims, let alone attempting to rescue any.

In Kazipur the attackers were fairly disciplined. No Hindu houses were attacked, though some of their tiled roofs were struck with lathis; no Muslim appears to have been manhandled; and in no case did the crowd break into the zenana (women's) section of a house.³⁴

³³ Loc. cit.

³⁴ Azamgarh Collectorate, Dept XIII, File 215 of 1895, High Court of Judicature for NWP (Criminal), Appellate Jurisdiction, Allahabad 15 May 1894 (District Ghazipur Criminal Appeal nos. 1, 24, 54, 104, Govt Appeal no. 147 and Revision no. 125 of 1894.)

But such discrimination was not the most usual product of the extended propaganda and agitation that was being carried on along these lines. We have noticed the venom with which a section of the crowd at Mau attacked an isolated Muslim body even after all their major demands had been conceded. Six miles away at Kopaganj on the same day, that is, 25 June 1893, a crowd of several thousand Hindus attacked the bazaar, the police *chauki*, policemen who were present, Muslim houses in one locality and Muslims who turned out to defend themselves. One Hindu from Ballia district was killed in the fighting, and a very large number of Muslim men and women injured—most of the women inside their houses, where the attackers did not flinch from taking from them the jewellery and ear-rings they were wearing, 'tearing the ears in so doing'.³⁵

III *Shahabad, 1917*

The excesses of 1893, increased police precautions and efforts to bring about agreement between local Hindu and Muslim leaders, successfully choked off the Cow-Protection movement in the Bhojpuri region. But there was a significant revival of the demand for cow-protection in the eastern Bhojpuri districts and neighbouring areas in Bihar after 1910: this was to culminate in a massive outbreak of violence in Shahabad at the Baqr-Id of 1917.

Shahabad had felt the power of the Gaurakshini movement in its early stages. As long ago as August 1888 butchers in Arrah complained to the authorities that they could obtain no cattle on account of Gaurakshini propaganda. That year, and again in 1890 and 1891, the important cattle fair at Berhampur was the scene of major demonstrations by crowds of Hindus and the confiscation of some heads of cattle from the Muslim butchers and contractors acting for the military commissariat. On the second and third of these occasions, the crowd attacked the Muslims with lathis; and on the third the assault was not called off until the police had opened fire on the assailants. Then in 1893 there occurred a 'great riot' at the village of Koath in Shahabad district, when Hindus and then Muslims appeared in considerable force to attack the other party. Guns were used, numerous casualties resulted, and a large body of additional police had to be stationed at Koath and forty-six other villages.

The neighbouring districts of Saran, Gaya and Patna, where too

³⁵ Azamgarh Collectorate Dept. XIII, File 146 of 1894, Register of 'Return Showing Persons Convicted in Connection with Disturbances during and after Bakr Id 1893', no. 8 regarding 'Riot at Kopaganj'.

ill-feeling had been reported since 1888, had their share of turbulence. From Gaya it was reported in May 1893 that hardly a day passed without some cases of actual or threatened rioting on account of the anti-kine killing agitation. The government imposed punitive police in some parts of these districts as well; but this did not prevent rioting at a number of places during the Baqr-Id of June 1893.³⁶

The recrudescence of cow-protection activities after 1910 coincided, in the Patna Division, with the rise of the Gwala Movement. We have mentioned earlier that the prevention of cow-slaughter became a major object of the Ahirs as they advanced their bid for a higher social status. This particular aspect of their movement, however, soon gained far wider support, especially among Marwaris, Rajputs, Brahmans, Bhumihars and Kayasths (the last two, of course, engaged at this time in establishing their own 'pure' and 'high' status). In 1911, crowds of Ahirs and Babhans (Bhumihar-Brahmans) collected to prevent the sacrifice of cows at various places in Patna district. In 1915 what was described as a large and armed 'Rajput mob' was active towards the same end in Kanchanpur and Barawan villages in the Fatuha *thana* of Patna district. The exercise was repeated and extended in 1916: some five thousand armed Hindus 'arranged in a kind of military formation', attacked the Military Police in Kanchanpur *after* the *qurbani* had been performed, and were repulsed only after police firing had killed and wounded a large number of them.³⁷

The outbreak of violence in Shahabad the following year was on an altogether different scale, described by observers as 'unprecedented since 1857-58'. What began as a show of strength in the villages of Piru and Ibrahimpur on the occasion of the Baqr-Id, 28 September 1917, developed in the days immediately following into a huge conflagration that engulfed a vast area. Officials spoke of a veritable war and acknowledged that over a hundred and fifty square miles of territory had passed out of their control.³⁸ Administrative fiat of a

³⁶ For the above, see L.S.S. O'Malley, *Shahabad District Gazetteer*, revised by J.F.W. James (Patna 1923), p. 44; India Office Records, L/P & J/3/96 'Note on the Agitation Against Cow-killing'; L/P & J/6/1466 [Bakrid riots in Patna, 1916]; and Home Progs, Confidential 1919, vol. 52, Prog no.155, July 1919 ['Note on Previous Cow-killing Riots and Disturbances in Patna Division', 14 Jan. 1918]. ³⁷ Loc. cit.

³⁸ Ibid. Prog. no.154, letter I-C, C.E.A.W. Oldham, Commissioner Patna-Chief Secy. Govt of Bihar and Orissa, 31 Dec. 1917/4 Jan. 1918 (hereafter Oldham's Report), p. 20; India Office Records, L/P & J/6/1507, Letter 168/I-C, H. McPherson, Chief Secy. Govt of Bihar and Orissa - Secy Home Dept, Govt of India, Patna, 11 Mar. 1918 (hereafter McPherson's Report), pp. 4, 10.

kind was restored by the strong military reinforcements that were called in, but only after a week of frustrating warfare between the armed police and troops seeking to protect Muslim villages and enforce 'law and order' and thousands of Hindu peasants and zamindars wielding lathis and occasionally spears, congregating in a matter of moments and as quickly melting away. The sequence of events leading up to this massive confrontation deserves to be examined in some detail.

A few weeks before the Baqr-Id of 1917, a meeting of barristers, pleaders, *mukhtars* and 'many others of the influential gentry of the town and district' was held in Arrah. There was another meeting at the district level a few days before the riots broke out at the end of September. This took place in the house of Jai Bahadur, a rich banker of Arrah town and President of the Arrah Gaurakshini Sabha, and was again attended by a mixed group of lawyers, merchants and zamindars.

At one of these meetings, probably the former, the decision appears to have been taken to hold a demonstration on the occasion of the Baqr-Id and, if possible, to prevent the cow-sacrifice at Ibrahimpur. Among those present at the earlier meeting were the co-owners of Ibrahimpur village—the Arrah pleader, Shyam Sundar Lal, and Jamuna Sahu. Shyam Sundar's family had purchased the village from a Muslim zamindar several generations earlier, but the tenants had apparently remained loyal to the original *malik* and his descendants, including Nazir Beg who was killed in the 1917 riots. Shyam Sundar's ancestors had been subjected to a good deal of pressure through continuous litigation and had eventually sold half the property to Jamuna Sahu's grandfather. It was said that since Jamuna Sahu and Shyam Sundar had inherited the property 'the raiyats have been coerced to their side and Nazir Beg has been subjected to much harassment, one act being to interfere with the long established custom of *qurbani* in his house and mosque.'³⁹ In 1916, tension was acute in the village and tempers ran dangerously high at the Baqr-Id and the Hindu festival of Gaidar when pigs were baited by cattle.

Also present at the first Arrah meeting was Rajeshar Lal, the brother of Mathura Lal (*patwari* of Bacchri, a village adjoining Ibrahimpur)

³⁹ Home Progs, Confidential, 1919, vol. 52, Prog no. 165, Letter no. 583 S.B., D.I.G. Crime and Railways—Chief Secy, 10 Apr. 1919. This account is based chiefly on this letter and, in the same Prog, Letter no. 2388C, G. Rainy, Chief Secy to Secy Home Dept, Govt of India, Ranchi, 18 June 1919.

who was to be convicted for his part in events in the area. It is more than likely that these men suggested that Ibrahimpur be the locale for the proposed demonstration. Certainly Shyam Sundar Lal's brothers, Dukhbhanjan and Suresh Prasad, appear to have contributed actively to preparations for the demonstration in their village. Mathura Lal too took a leading part and so, notably, did the Ahirs of Bacchri. The latter were said to have initiated the protest against *qurbani* at Ibrahimpur in 1916; and Bhutan Ahir, a resident and *chaukidar* of Ibrahimpur, was described as one of the prime movers of the agitation in 1916 and again in 1917—a clear indication of a convergence of interest in this matter between the Ahirs and the zamindars.

It was Mathura Lal and some Ahirs of Bacchri who contacted Lakshmi Narain Misr, the Sub-Inspector of Police at Piru, and gained the support of the local Hindu policemen. Thereafter some meetings in connection with the demonstration were actually held inside the Piru police station and some of the early *patias* (or 'snow-ball' letters) which were really in the nature of notices about the proposed actions, were drafted and sent out from there—in the hands of police *chaukidars*. Meetings were also held during this period in other places in the interior of the district, providing a platform for both cow-protection and Home Rule propaganda, so much so, wrote the Divisional Commissioner afterwards, that these became 'a regular topic of conversation in the villages'.⁴⁰

This round of meetings and the first *patias* sent out by the leaders in Piru met with an unexpectedly enthusiastic response. Hurried arrangements had to be made through the good offices of men like Thakur Gopi Singh, a local zamindar, to feed the thousands of Hindus who assembled at Piru on 28 September 1917. The claim that the action on that date was intended to be a limited one is supported by the fact that some of the hundreds of Hindus who made their way to Piru and Ibrahimpur in order to demonstrate against *qurbani* came from and marched through villages where the ceremony had been performed without any interference at all. It seems likely, though, that even before these groups set out and saw others advancing in the direction of Piru in considerable strength, new expectations and new ideas about the needs of justice had risen in many minds, fed by reports of meetings, by *patias*, and by a whole variety of rumours

⁴⁰ Oldham's Report, p. 24.

regarding the end of British rule, the impending arrival of German troops, and the coming of swaraj.⁴¹

In Ibrahimpur, meanwhile, the local Hindus and Muslims had succeeded in effecting a compromise on the question of *qurbani*. By an agreement signed on 27 September the Ibrahimpur Muslims surrendered their right to sacrifice cows in deference to the religious feelings of the Hindus, and the latter agreed to provide thirty goats, to be sacrificed instead of cows, every year from then on. This was a considerable and meaningful achievement, for at the height of the trouble the Hindus of Ibrahimpur not only took no part in the rioting but sheltered the Muslim men, women and children in their own houses.⁴²

On 28 September local Hindu leaders, or at least some of them, sought to inform the assembled crowds of this compromise agreement and asked them to return home. 'But', to quote the inimitable language of the British policeman in India, 'the mobs having assembled were not to be denied their fun.'⁴³ The crowd of about five thousand Hindus at Ibrahimpur was 'very aggressive' and could not be pacified by the deputy Superintendent of Police or by Hindu leaders. Ultimately over half of this crowd rushed at the police party, assaulted the Deputy Superintendent and escaped with all the goats and cattle of the village plus a certain amount of movable property. On the same day, before any cow-sacrifice had occurred, the crowds also attacked and caused much damage to Bhagalpur and Milki, two villages near Ibrahimpur and Piru. They then threatened the larger Piru bazaar, and were stopped only when the Sub-Inspector of Police, Lakshmi Narain Misr, challenged them to kill him, a Brahman, first. Misr's intervention is significant for before this he was, as we have seen, an important force in organizing the demonstration: for one of its chief organizers at any rate, it is clear, the movement had gone off the rails.

At this juncture the administration took the strange view (which,

⁴¹ For the rumours, and slogans harking back to 1857 and the memory of Kunwar Singh, see my 'Sectarian and Other Solidarities. Some Observations on "Communal" Mobilization in Modern India', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress. Fortieth Session, Waltair* (1979).

⁴² Oldham's Report, Appendices II and III (Letter no. 527C, Inglis-Commissioner Patna Divn, 29 Sept. 1917, and 'Report' by S. Ahmad Ali, S.D.O. Sadr, 28 Sept. 1917).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Letter no. 1583-S.B. from D.I.G. Crime & Railways, 10 Apr. 1919.

they claimed, was accepted by representative Hindu leaders) that the attack had violated the Ibrahimpur agreement and hence the Muslims were entitled to perform *qurbani*. So after the arrival of the armed police a cow-sacrifice took place at Piru on the evening of 28 September, and a Sub-Divisional officer supervised the *qurbani* in Milki, Bhagalpur and Ibrahimpur on the following day despite some evidence of reluctance on the part of the Ibrahimpur Muslims to perform the sacrifice.

This act of provocation appears to have marked the critical point in the development of events. All through the night of 29 September a small but angry crowd stood at Bacchri Bridge, not far from where J. D. Boylan, the Superintendent of Police for the district of Shahabad, was camping at the Piru police station. From time to time they burst into threatening shouts and slogans. At dawn on the 30th, rapidly swelling crowds congregated on Piru, shouting for vengeance in the places where cows had been slaughtered. Before long there was an enormous crowd on both sides of the police station, stretching 'in a dense mass from the cross-roads in Piru Bazar for at least a mile along the Piru-Jagdishpur road'. Boylan reported that the crowd at this stage was so concentrated that the lathis above their heads were like a hairbrush; and from the area they occupied he estimated the assembly at about fifty thousand.⁴⁴ In due course nearly all the Muslim houses in Piru, Ibrahimpur, Bhagalapur and Milki were looted and a major confrontation took place between the police and the Hindu crowds. The Superintendent of the Police and his party of forty armed policemen were attacked and forced to withdraw into the police station, but in the end, following a number of arrests, the killing and wounding of several rioters in police firing, and threats of further and prolonged firing, the crowds dispersed. The District Magistrate felt that the worst was over: 'I do not anticipate any further rioting.'⁴⁵ The mass of Hindus had other intentions as they scattered in different directions, having failed to prevent the *qurbani* at Ibrahimpur and Piru, and having faced the police in an extended and, as it transpired, yet

⁴⁴ L/P & J/6/1507, report from *The Times*, 16 Jan. 1918; Oldham's Report, Appendix V, Copy of First Information Report, Piru and Milki (sd. J. D. Boylan, S.P., Bacchri Bridge, 30 Sept. 1917, 1.40 p. m.). The account of events in this area is taken from Oldham's Report, Appendices III-V, VIII and IX.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Appendix IV, Letter no. 531-C, Inglis-Commissioner (Arrah, Piro, 30 Sept.- 1 Oct. 1917).

undecided contest. A day later a huge Hindu backlash arose and very soon engulfed the major part of the district in violence.

Two months later officials tried to compute the casualties and damages. They calculated that 41 people had been killed and 176 injured, while admitting that these estimates were probably very much on the low side. 124 villages were said to have been looted in Shahabad district alone; another 28 reportedly suffered the same fate in Gaya, and one in Patna. The value of property damaged, destroyed or stolen was reckoned to be Rs 7 lakhs in Shahabad, Rs 1 lakh in Gaya. The number of people sent up for trial was 1,800 in Shahabad, 400 in Gaya and 38 in Patna: but at this stage, eight weeks after the date of the riots, many of the accused were still 'absconding'.⁴⁶

It is neither possible, nor perhaps necessary, to chronicle in detail the battles and the ravages that occurred in the district in the first few days of October 1917. An account of the assault on two villages in the Nasriganj *thana*—Mauna and Turukbigha—should serve to indicate the prevalent atmosphere. Something of an island among a sea of large Hindu villages, Mauna was inhabited almost entirely by Muslims, among whom were its owners. The handful of its Hindu residents belonged to the lower castes and were servants and tenants of the Muslim *maliks*. On 2 October Sita Dusadh and Pyari Ahir, two Hindu inhabitants, brought news of a *patia* threatening an attack on the village. A telegram was immediately sent to the District Magistrate, and the matter was reported at the police station of Nasriganj on the 3rd and again on the 4th. On the 4th, Baldwin, the Special Magistrate at Nasriganj, rode out to Mauna with a private of the Somersets. After enquiries there, he warned the inhabitants of the adjacent Hindu village of Taraon to keep the peace. It may be noted here that a number of Taraon Hindus held land in Mauna on mortgage. At the same time, the Mauna Muslims held half of Parasia, another nearby Hindu village: and in the course of the Settlement of 1912-16 a dispute had arisen between a Muslim *malik* of Mauna, on the one side, and, on the other, Girja Lal (*thikadar* of Parasia) and Saudagar Sunri, both of whom were to be charged with participation in the attack on Mauna. Another factor that was mentioned in this context by many local people may also be noted. This was that the Ahirs of Babhandi (the village adjoining Mauna on the east), many of whom

⁴⁶ *Progs. of Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council* (29 Nov. 1917), reply to question by S. K. Sahay (extract in *Home Progs Confidential*, 1919, vol. 52).

again were accused and convicted of joining in the attack, were involved in various disputes with the Muslims of Mauna regarding the supply of milk and other matters; some of the Ahirs certainly held land in Mauna. There is no direct evidence that these pre-existing quarrels had anything to do with the attack on this village. Yet it is worth taking note of them for they may well have contributed to its scale and ferocity.

On his return to Nasriganj from Mauna on 4 October, Baldwin learnt of a serious attack that had been mounted on Turukbigha. The next day brought an assault on Nasriganj itself, which was fought off by the twenty-five Somersets stationed there. With Muslim villages thus being attacked all round, the administration was stretched beyond capacity and Baldwin 'was not in a position' (as official reports later noted) 'to give effective help for the protection of Mauna'. But the Muslims of the village organized their own defence. Behind the seven barricades that they erected and with what arms they could readily get together, a party of some 50 Muslims and 15 Hindus fought off a huge body of attackers for many hours before they finally surrendered.

About noon on 5 October Hindu crowds attacked Mauna from the south (the direction of Taraon), and then from the east (where Babhandi lay). Both attacks were repulsed. The defenders evidently rushed from one barricade to another, depending on where the main thrust of the attackers was at that stage. Both sides were armed with swords, spears, choppers and lathis; the Mauna Muslims also had one or two guns. With these they evidently accounted for a number of the assailants: even after several bodies had been carried away by the attackers, three were left on the ground. Around five in the evening, the attacking crowds began throwing bricks. The Mauna people could not retaliate. Weak with exhaustion, they now gave way. Three Muslims were killed as they retreated through the village; another, a youth lying ill in a house, died of shock. A number of Muslims were injured, and the Judge suspected that there had been cases of rape, although (as frequently happens in such circumstances) no one came forward to report any. Several houses were set on fire and saved only by the damp left by recent rains. Prayer-carpet and copies of the Qoran were defiled and burnt. However, most of the Muslims hid successfully in the houses of the local Hindus, or outside the village. They reappeared only after the withdrawal of the rioters at night, but then hid again all that night and the next day owing to rumours of new attacks. Only then, on 7 October,

were they able to reach the police station at Nasriganj to make a report. Baldwin, who now visited Mauna again, observed that the village had been 'absolutely sacked'.

Our second example is the attack on Turukbigha, a hamlet of *mauza* Khiriaon which lay in the zamindari of Lalchattarpati Singh, one of the principal accused in the case that was instituted in connection with the Turukbigha events. On 28 September 1917, *qurbani* had been performed as usual in Turukbigha, quietly and without interference from any quarter. On 2 October, however, the hamlet was attacked by a crowd of some two thousand Hindus. This attack was beaten back. Two days later another crowd, again estimated at about two thousand, renewed the attack. They were twice repulsed, but then, backed by large reinforcement that came in from many sides, they succeeded in forcing their way into Turukbigha. Two Muslims were killed before they could reach the relative safety of the sugarcane fields around the village or places still further away—fields and homes where their women, younger children and elders had already hidden. Baldwin, just back from his first visit to Mauna, met a 'panic-stricken mob' of Muslim men, women and children of Turukbigha two miles away from the village.

There would seem to have been some remarkable points of similarity in the attacks on Mauna and Turukbigha, though to some extent these may have been the outcome of the due process of law as practised by the colonial courts in India. In each case, there appears to have been a spirited defence by a small body of Muslims: in Turukbigha, the defenders were said to number 110 to 115, including boys. In both, the crowd that launched the final attack was said to be about 15,000 strong: 'at any rate', the Judge wrote in the Turukbigha case as he had done in that of Mauna, 'there must have been many thousands'. In Turukbigha, as in Mauna, the flight of the Muslims was followed by large-scale plunder and burning of Muslim houses, the fire being put out by rain which fell in Turukbigha immediately after the riot. 'Every Muhammadan house [in Turukbigha] had been looted', Baldwin reported, 'and what was not worth taking away was broken.' But for the rain, he added, probably the entire *basti* (habitation) would have been gutted.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ L/P & J/6/1507, Court of Commissioners of Special Tribunal of Arrah, Trial no. 5 of 1917, Emperor vs. Akhaj Ahir and others (village Mauna, P. S. Nasriganj); Trial no. 6 of 1917, Emperor vs. Abilakh Ahir and others (village Turukbigha, P.S. Nasriganj); cutting from *The Times*, 4 Mar. 1918.

The situation between 3 October and 5 October 1917 was such that ten or fifteen Muslim villages were being attacked daily within the Nasriganj jurisdiction alone; and like Mauna, many other villages must have gone without police protection. Where the police did appear in the course of the attack, they were sometimes met by stout resistance. At Hariharganj, a Muslim hamlet of Nasriganj, for example, on 5 October 1917 an armed force of two Gurkhas and twenty others opened fire on a crowd of about a thousand: yet the crowd refused to fall back and fought on until one person had been killed and six others lay seriously wounded (all of the latter died subsequently). Elsewhere, sections of the Hindu population not participating in the actual attacks showed open sympathy for the rioters. Thus on 3 October, near the village of Bagahi, local women directed Lieutenant F. C. Temple and his troops away from village Chakaria (Chakrahi) where the loot from Bagahi was at that very time being stored. As it happened, the troops spotted gangs of looters and a large herd of cattle taken from Bagahi. 'The whole of the surrounding country was strewn with loot of various kinds', Temple reported, 'such as beds, doors, school books, clothes boxes, grain, etc. The most valuable stuff had been removed earlier and we only arrived when the low caste riff-raff were gleaning what was left by the principal looters.'⁴⁸

IV *Organizers and Participants*

Men from a range of several castes and classes were involved in the organization and spread of the Cow-Protection movement and in the consequent attacks upon Muslims in various parts of north India. The initiative for the establishment of Gaurakshini Sabhas came in very many cases from petty-bourgeois elements that drifted from country to town and back again : teachers, lawyers, clerks, officials. Strengthening their effort, indeed often goading them into action was a motley crew of swamis, sanyasis and faqirs. But 'the main supporters of the movement' were, according to the officials, 'the great Hindu trading and banking classes, who are bigoted Hindus, and several prominent Hindu Rajas have given it their adhesion and support'. As Anthony Macdonnell (then acting Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa) wrote to the Commissioner of Patna Division in

⁴⁸ Oldham's Report, Appendices VI and VII.

November 1893, there could be no doubt that the 'Marwaris' were 'the supporters and fomentors' of the agitation.⁴⁹

Many of the wealthiest and most prominent patrons withdrew from the front, however, as the movement advanced to the use of coercive tactics and even came to threaten the machinery for the maintenance of 'law and order'. Commenting on the Cow-Protection movement in his jurisdiction, the Darbhanga Magistrate observed in October 1893 that many of the Gaurakshini Sabhas in the district had been established through the beneficence of the Maharaja of Darbhanga and other notables. The Maharaja, as President of the Darbhanga Sabha, still exercised a fair amount of power: 'in Darbhanga and its subordinate branches a controlling hand is noticeable, and beyond protecting and taking care of cows not much activity is observable'. But in the most militant Gaurakshini Sabha in the district, that of Madhubani, and in its branches, 'a very different state of affairs is visible'. The Madhubani Sabha now denied any connection with the alleged 'parent' Sabha at Darbhanga : it claimed to have been established independently by some young men of Madhubani who were deeply influenced by the discourse of certain pandits at Sonapur. The Sabha was run by its two Secretaries, Munshi Lal Behari Lal, a *mukhtar*, and Mahabir Prasad, a teacher in the Middle Vernacular School, both men with 'abilities far above the average, [and] a fine capability for organization'. The joint Presidents, the Madhubani Babus (Durga Dutt and Hakdhari Singh), were mere figure-heads. 'The Sabha is therefore a most aggressive one.' The whole movement for Cow-Protection had been supported 'without any secrecy', the Magistrate observed, 'by the leading members of the Hindu faith [*sic*], such as the Maharajas of Benares, Dumraon, Darbhanga, Raja Ramphal Singh and other Rajas in Oudh and the North-Western Provinces—gentlemen all on the different Councils of their various Governments. . . . Not one of the original founders of the Gaurakshini Sabhas [he ruefully added], certainly not any of the Presidents, ever thought that the result of their societies would be to disturb whole districts, to have riots common, and armed forces required to keep the peace.'⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Bodleian Library, Oxford, 'Confidential Correspondence' of Sir A. P. Macdonnell (Ms. Eng. Hist. d. 235), Macdonnell to Forbes, 9 Nov. 1893; L/P & J/3/96, 'Note on Agitation Against Cow-killing', p. 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, H.C. Williams, Magistrate and Collector, Darbhanga to Commissioner, Patna Division, 18 Oct. 1893, and appended 'Note on Madhubani Gaurakshini Sabha'.

'Half-educated English-speaking agitators', priests and zamindars : these were the people whom officials held responsible for the rise of the Gaurakshini movement with such suddenness and force in Azamgarh in 1893. For the disturbances in the district at the Baqr-Id that year, they singled out four men as the principal instigators: Pandit Ghanshyam Narain Misr of Nimdand, Thakur Jagdeo Narain Singh of Nagra (Ballia district), Thakur Sudishth Narain Singh of Mau, and Khaki Baba (or Das).⁵¹ The faqir Khaki Baba was an important orator for the Gaurakshini Sabhas; and though officials were as ever ready to stick the label of 'another professional agitator' on to him, he clearly belonged to their second category of Gaurakshini leaders—the priests, who lent a certain legitimacy and fanaticism to the movement.

The Brahman, Ghanshyam Narain, may also be thought of as belonging to this category, but as the owner of a certain amount of landed property in both Azamgarh and Ballia districts he qualified as a zamindar Gaurakshinist as well. That he played a leading part in the establishment of the movement in Azamgarh district cannot be doubted. He was President of the Gaurakshini Sabha in the Sagri pargana and all the subscriptions of the notorious Nathupur division were deposited with him. The other two zamindars in the above list of instigators are of greater interest still, for the evidence regarding them brings out well the role of this class in mobilizing the forces for demonstrations of the kind that occurred in June 1893.

Jagdeo Narain Singh, a Bais Rajput of Nagra, once owner of 'a fair estate' which had however fallen into the hands of *mahajans*, President of the Ballia Gaurakshini Sabha, was described as 'the soul of the movement' in eastern Azamgarh, where he was particularly active in the weeks immediately preceding the 1893 riots. A petition from 'poor Muslim residents of several villages in Azamgarh', sent to the Government of India a week before the Baqr-Id, named Jagdeo Bahadur, zamindar of Nagra, as chief of the assailants who were making preparations to 'take the head' of Muslims who sacrificed cattle at the 'Id.⁵² According to a police guard, both Jagdeo and

⁵¹ The following account regarding these men is based on Dupernex's Report, pp. 17-20

⁵² Gorakhpur Commissioner's Record Room, Dept XVI, File 37/1898-1900, 'Petition to Secy Govt of India, from poor Muslim residents of several villages in Azamgarh, 18 June 1893'.

Ghanshyam Narain Misr were present at Adri (the village on the way to Mau where men from Ballia district and elsewhere assembled early on the morning of 25 June). They were seen with other leaders 'on elephants, &c., marshalling the people'. Other evidence too seems to confirm these reports about their involvement. One of the first prisoners arrested in Ghazipur in connection with the Azamgarh events said he had gone to Azamgarh on 25 June under the orders of his zamindar to attend a *sabha* (meeting) convened by Jagdeo. It was noted too that the Kshatriyas of Chiriakot and its neighbourhood, many of whom were convicted for their part in the demonstration against *qurbani* at Chiriakot, were closely connected with Jagdeo Narain.

Sudishth Narain Singh of Mau—'the most influential Hindu in those parts . . . not a Hindu in the neighbourhood would dare to lift a finger if he ordered otherwise'—was said to have joined the other organizers of the 25 June demonstrations in their appeal for support from outside the district by letters circulated in a border *thana* of Ghazipur district calling on the Thakurs there to send in fifty men from each village to help the Hindus at Mau. As a man of property and a real or professed well-wisher of the government, Sudishth Narain staunchly denied this accusation. For this ambivalence, as it appeared to some, he was abused to his face by a number of the Ghazipur men who congregated at Mau on the day of the Baqr-Id. In any case, the use of his name, whether on his own initiative or without his prior knowledge, remains a significant indicator of the kinds of people who took a leading part in this agitation and the manner in which they mobilized support.

There are other pieces of evidence pointing to the support lent to the movement by petty zamindars and co-sharers in many different parts of Azamgarh district. The Muslim petitioners mentioned above listed Sheo Das Singh of Mau, Imrit Singh of village Pradhan, Harjan Singh of Jafarpur Korthi (all three presumably Rajputs) and Beasji Maharaj of Kua Kopaganj as the four 'chiefs' for Azamgarh appointed by Jagdeo Narain Singh, and stated that the subscriptions raised, as well as the account books and detailed correspondence, were maintained at Imrit Singh's house.⁵³ In Nizamabad pargana, the entire *chutki* collections were said to be deposited in the hands of some of the local zamindars. In Sagri, the 'treasurers' were Ghanshyam Narain

⁵³ Loc. cit.

Misr for Nathupur and an Agrawal trader, Bhairon Prasad, for the western division. In the other critical pargana of Muhammadabad, the proceeds were sent up to a faqir, two Goshains (probably practising 'men of religion') and a number of small Rajput and Bhumihar zamindars and co-sharers—including Jaggi Singh of Bhujohi and Sitlu Singh of Aldemau, who together with Girja Pande of Chiriatkot were described as the 'chief men' of the Sabhas in Muhammadabad.⁵⁴

Still within this pargana, the Thakur and Bhumihar co-sharers of Kasara and its neighbouring villages near Mau were reported to have 'taken up the anti-cow killing movement with vigour' at an early stage.⁵⁵ The same may be said of the Rajput zamindars of Gujarpur and other villages around Mubarakpur, their religious enthusiasm multiplied perhaps by their long-standing rivalry with the zamindars and other Muslims of that weaving centre. In Sagri, again, the Surajpur Babus, owners of the Surajpur taluqa and of other estates in Saran and Ghazipur, Bhumihars by caste and related to the Maharaja of Banaras, 'sympathized actively' with the Cow-Protection movement. The thousands of demonstrators who assembled at Ghosi on 25 June 1893, it was reported, came chiefly from the Nathupur division and from Ballia district beyond it; many of them (some five thousand, according to one report) had come into Ghosi from the direction of Surajpur. 'What I wish to emphasize as regards the disturbance at Ghosi' wrote the Azamgarh Magistrate, 'is that it would have been next to impossible for such an assembly of Hindus to have gathered there without the connivance of the Babus of Surajpur.'⁵⁶

In the numerous demonstrations and attacks on Muslim habitations that took place at the Baqr-Id of 1893 in Azamgarh district and elsewhere in the Bhojpuri region, the chief zamindari castes—Rajputs, Bhumihars and Brahmans—provided a large part of the fighting force. They brought along with them tenants, servants and others belonging to a whole range of other castes.⁵⁷ In Shahabad in 1917, too, many of the

⁵⁴ Dupernex's Report, 'Appendix on Ramifications of the Gaurakshini Sabha in Azamgarh District'.

⁵⁵ Azamgarh Collectorate, Dept XIII, File 146/1894, Magistrate Azamgarh-Commissioner Gorakhpur, 19 Jan. 1893.

⁵⁶ Dupernex's Report, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Apart from some information from the trials instituted after the riots, we have interesting evidence in the list of assailants presented in the Muslims' petition from Azamgarh, 18 June 1893 (no. 52 above). The caste-breakdown of the men accused of preparing to use armed force against the Muslims is as follows: Bhumihars 94, Rajputs

most active elements appear to have come from the same groups. Colonial administrators, ready to smell a conspiracy anywhere, sought to dig up evidence of the unseen hand, of the bigger 'zamindars, pleaders and mukhtears attending meetings and encouraging the movement ... [though] none of them appeared to have been in evidence during the disturbances'. What was beyond question, however, was 'the general support of zamindars and their agents. . . given to the movement throughout the affected area.'⁵⁸ Reports from different parts of the district spoke of the leading part played by Rajput and other petty zamindars. 'Nearly all the men of this class over half the district joined the movement', the Chief Secretary to the government of the province wrote later. 'It was precisely these landholders of moderate position, men of good caste and good family, able to turn out two or three hundred *lathials* each, who led the mobs in the important attacks.'⁵⁹ Evidence from some of the trials that were held after the riots tends to confirm these impressions.⁶⁰

About the attack on Turukbigha on 4 October 1917, discussed above, it was noted that it differed from the attack on Mauna a day later in that the men leading the former were 'not local cultivators or petty zamindars, but the zamindar [Lalchattarpati Singh] himself, and another well-to-do zamindar of the neighbourhood, Lobhi Upadhya-[ya] of Mangraon'. After the repulse of the initial assault on 2 October, Lalchattarpati Singh appears to have sent out messengers to Mangraon, Sabari and other nearby places, asking for reinforcements to enable a successful second attack to be launched. On this second occasion, Lobhi Upadhya appeared on an elephant. His brother Ramasray 'and two other Brahmins' were said to have been on horseback. His son was also reported to have been seated behind him on the elephant, though he was ultimately acquitted of the charge of participation in the riot. A large number of the other men accused and convicted of joining in the attacks on Turukbigha were kinsfolk, servants and tenants of Lalchattarpati Singh and Lobhi Upadhya.

31, Brahmans 16 (these three accounting for 141 of the total of 198), Baniyas 9, Sonars 5, Koeris 5, Kandus 5, Katuas 4, Gosains 3, Others 20, Unidentified 6.

⁵⁸ Home Progs, Confidential, 1919, vol. 52, no. 1583 S.B., D.I.G.'s letter of 10 Apr. 1919.

⁵⁹ McPherson's Report, p. 7.

⁶⁰ The next two paragraphs are based primarily on L/P & J/6/1507, Court of Commissioners of Special Tribunal of Arrah, Trials nos. 6 and 4 of 1917.

We have had occasion earlier to refer to Thakur Gopi Singh of Narainpur, 'a well-to-do zamindar and perhaps the most important person convicted in connection with the disturbances',⁶¹ who provided food for the vast crowds that gathered to demonstrate at Piru and Ibrahimpur on 28 September. In the case in which he was convicted, relating to an attack on the village of Katar on 2 October, 105 people were sent up for trial. Of these 15 (including Gopi Singh) described themselves as zamindars; two were *mahajans*, and one, Rambaran Lal, the hereditary *patwari* of Katar. The attack on Katar, a village owned by Muslim zamindars, appears to have been organized from Narainpur which lay a few hundred yards to the south. Both Rambaran Lal, who was to the fore in the actual organization of the assault, and Gopi Singh were resident here; and among the Narainpur men found guilty of taking part in the attack on Katar were seven Rajputs (Gopi Singh, three relatives of his, and three others); five Kayasths (Rambaran, his brother, son and two other relatives); Madho Kumhar, a servant of Gopi and a Chamar, a Sunri and a Dhobi.

Gopi Singh, Lalchattarpati Singh and Lobhi Upadhyaya were perhaps the biggest landholders convicted for participation in the riots. More usually the zamindars who took part were not particularly noted for their wealth. In this sense, Mauna stands for the general run of events, and Turukbigha for the exceptional. Most of the accused in the Mauna case were 'cultivators'. Sixteen described themselves as zamindars; and among the others there were a *patwari*, two *bantias*, 'a banker' and a Brahman *chaukidar*. Yet the Commissioners of the Special Tribunal, in passing sentence on those found guilty in the Mauna affair, imposed no fines 'as we are not aware that any of the accused are very well-to-do men'.⁶²

Such men may well have been under greater economic pressure than the bigger zamindars. On the other hand, as part of the *ashraf*, they are likely to have been influential men in their villages even if poor. Yet the point which perhaps needs to be emphasized is that men from a smaller or wider circle of villages (and sometimes areas as large as a pargana) who shared a strong sense of community are here found leading their kinsmen, tenants and servants into battle for a

⁶¹ Home, Confidential, 1919, vol. 52, no. 4222, S.B., D.I.G.'s letter of 5 Sept. 1918.

⁶² L/P & J/6/1507, Trial no. 5 of 1917.

cause that they and others of their number had espoused. Perhaps the most striking evidence in support of this proposition is the fact that the area of Shahabad which erupted with such violence in 1917 coincided almost exactly with the area affected in 1857, when the same Rajput, Brahman and Bhumihar landowning (and 'martial') communities had risen in revolt under the banner of Kūnwar Singh.⁶³

For a more rounded picture of the 1917 Shahabad outbreak, however, and indeed of other demonstrations connected with cow-protection, it is necessary to recognize similar actions on the part of rather different communities that were becoming increasingly well organized at about this time—such as the Ahirs and the Koeris. Contemporary officials firmly believed in the monopoly of the upper classes over initiative (and thought), and hence devoted little attention to the significant role of such groups. Yet as we have already noticed, the evidence gathered by these same officials testifies to the important part played by the Ahirs in the organization of the demonstrations at Piru and Ibrahimpur in Shahabad in 1917. Again the crowd of approximately five thousand men armed with lathis who congregated at the latter village on 28 September were described as being 'mostly Rajputs, Ahirs and Chatris' [*sic*] from the villages of Dalippur, Jetaura, Tewani and Balligaon, Kastar and Katar.⁶⁴

The caste composition of those arrested for participation in the widespread rioting that followed confirms our impression of the special role of the Ahirs, a role that cannot be explained away by the suggestion that they were drawn in by the zamindari groups. Of the 140 trials instituted in consequence of the Shahabad riots, I have seen the detailed evidence and judgements in only seven cases.⁶⁵ Out of

⁶³ Oldham's Report, p. 17. The Commissioner also calls attention to the slogans that referred to Kunwar Singh's family ('Dalippur ke Babu ki Jai') and the reports implicating other members of the Ujjainia stock.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Appendix III, 'Report' by S. Ahmad Ali, 28 Sept. 1917, 7 p. m.

⁶⁵ L/P & J/6/1507, Court of Commissioners of Special Tribunal of Arrah, Trials nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 of 1917, and also case no. 486-G relating to an attack on Bithwa Rasulpur on 5 October, and Emperor vs. Algu Kandu, etc. relating to an attack on Bisaini Kalan on 5 October. In the last-named case, there was a large gap between the number of accused (253) and those convicted (83): in this case, therefore, I have taken account only of those convicted. Robb, *op. cit.*, uses evidence only from the first five of the above-mentioned trials. The figures in his table on p. 191 also differ from those presented here, I suspect, because of the general difficulty of identifying men's castes through their names; Bhumihars, for instance, commonly took the title of either Rai or Singh.

560 men sent up for trial in these, as many as 85 were Rajputs, 90 Brahmans and 55 Bhumihars. Other upper castes, fairly thin on the ground in any case, were represented by a handful of Kāyasths and Banias from one or two villages. Ahirs, however, were 'very prominent' in the riots, 127 of them being convicted in these seven cases alone. Doubts about the representative character of any sample are heightened in this instance, of course, by the feeling that privileged men of the upper castes would be far more readily noticed in the course of a riot. Yet, if this is granted, the identification of the lowly Ahirs in such large numbers becomes all the more significant.

I would suggest that we have evidence here of a relatively independent force that added a good deal of power to cow-protection activities in the Bhojpuri region—marginally 'clean' castes who aspired to full 'cleanness' by emphasizing the purity of their faith and the strictness of ritual adherence to it on the issue of cow-slaughter. In the case of the Ahirs this motive would certainly have been reinforced by their traditional and continued association with the business of tending cattle. The strength of their autonomous movement was seen very clearly in Shahabad in 1917, but their militancy and independence were already in evidence in Azamgarh in 1893, in the demonstrations and clashes around Ghosi for instance. Here on three successive days, 25-27 June 1893, large crowds of Hindus assembled to demonstrate against *qurbani*. On 25 June Ahirs and Kurmis took the lead in confiscating a cow from Abdul Latif of Milkipur, and the crowd of five thousand or more that gathered was not pacified until the next day when Abdul Latif surrendered the other cow that he owned and the *qurbani* was definitely abandoned.

On the same day an estimated four thousand Hindus assembled at Karimuddinpur, and a small section of this crowd armed with lathis attacked the Tahsildar and Sub-Inspector of Police, who were both on horses, and the accompanying party of officials, peons and policemen, inflicting substantial injuries upon them and forcing them to retreat. On the following day, at 9 a.m., trouble was again reported to be brewing in Karimuddinpur. Rather than risk another confrontation, officials sent Sher Ali Khan, an influential local Muslim who was on good terms with the Hindus, and three or four Hindus to try and retrieve the situation. This enterprise took the entire day to accomplish and it was only at 5 p.m. that the crowd was persuaded to leave the field. But while other sections agreed, groups of Koeris and Ahirs refused to leave without completing the task of plundering.

In the end, as the Tahsildar put it, 'the remaining low caste people made an assault at Mauza Karimuddinpur at the house of Haji Roshan, a wealthy merchant in the village'.⁶⁶ Later on, the Hindus 'of the riot' sought to attack the Hindus who had intervened on behalf of the administration; rain seems to have foiled their attempt. Early on the following morning a huge crowd, now estimated at seven thousand, again assembled, but a major affray was avoided—partly, no doubt, because with the Baqr-Id over and *qurbani* staved off, the principal point of the rioters had been made.

Major cases of rioting are always likely to provide opportunities for plunder, or for the settling of old scores by poor and exploited groups. It is possible that such factors were partly responsible for the actions of the lower caste folk at Karimuddinpur; and something of the same nature was probably operative in Shahabad in 1917 too, though the outbreak there was on an altogether different scale. We have seen how the initiatives of various zamindars, Ahirs and other elements, and the spate of *patias* and rumours that followed, produced a massive rising against local Muslims and the military and police force that sought to intervene. A very large part of the Hindu population of the district appears to have become involved, spurred on no doubt by the fear of social boycott and ostracism, indeed of religious damnation, as much as by any anger over cow-slaughter or resentment against the foreign rulers. In the later stages of the Shahabad outbreak, when the law-enforcing authorities had plainly lost control, whole gangs of men (many of them from the lowest castes and classes) also appear to have been drawn into the riots by the prospect of loot. Such would seem to have been the case with some Nonias of Katar who were found guilty, along with Gopi Singh and others, of participation in the riot there on 2 October : five of them were proved to have been among the men and women who robbed the Katar Muslims hiding in the fields behind their habitation. Such, too, were the groups of 'rioters' encountered by Lieutenant Temple and his force when they reached the village of Bagahi on 3 October. On 10 October, again, by which time the worst of the Shahabad outrages were over, portions of the district were still described as being in 'a disturbed state', and the men responsible for this were said to be 'low class [caste ?] Hindus'.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ The details of these events are taken from L/P & J/6/357, Chand Narain, Offg Tahsildar, Ghosi to Magistrate, Azamgarh, 28 June 1893.

⁶⁷ L/P & J/6/1507, Telegram Viceroy to Secy of State for India, 10 Oct. 1917, and Trial no. 4; Oldham's Report, Appx. VII.

However that might be, the point which emerges clearly from the evidence is that for most of the period under study cow-protection activities in the Bhojpuri region were the affair mainly of the upper castes, together with one or two lower castes striving for a higher status. In eastern UP, the largest Hindu caste, the Chamar, far from being actively involved in the Cow-Protection movement, was in fact the target of a good deal of Gaurakshinist vilification and attack. One of the rules of the Gorakhpur Gaurakshini Sabha condemned the Chamar as a cow-killer, declared it 'most reprehensible that he should be employed to attend cows, or that cows, bullocks and so on should be left to his mercy', and called for a boycott on the employment of Chamars as cowherds.⁶⁸ In Shahabad in 1917, as already noted, the Rajputs, Bhumihars, Brahmans and Ahirs together accounted for 347 of the 560 men convicted of participation in the riots in the seven cases I have examined, apart from any who are among the small number that are unidentifiable. Thus they constituted nearly two-thirds of this small but not insignificant sample, while men from numerous other low and untouchable castes together made up the remaining third.

Muslims were always likely to be the prime victims of extended strife between Hindus and themselves in a region where they were a small minority. Yet the aggressors in such a conflict were not always the non-Muslims, as the example of the 1904 riot in Mubarakpur (Azamgarh district) that the weaver Abdul Majid wrote about, will serve to demonstrate. This riot appears to have emanated in large part from the tensions generated by the Cow-Protection movement. There had been earlier instances of clashes between Hindus and Muslims in the substantial weaving centre of Mubarakpur with its Muslim zamindars and majority Muslim population. Indeed in 1813 and 1842 there had been outbreaks of violence in which the Julahas or Muslim weavers had attacked and plundered the houses of some of the Hindu moneylenders and killed a number of occupants in two of them; and these were only the most obvious indications of the friction that there was between various groups of Hindus and Muslims in Mubarakpur in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. But the Julahas' actions in these instances appear to have been a response to

⁶⁸ India Office Records, L/P & J/6/365, File 84 of 1894, Hoey's 'Note on the Cow-Protection Agitation in Gorakhpur District', pp. 2, 4, cited by S. Freitag in her dissertation chapter on 'Communalism in the Countryside' (unpublished).

the attempts of the rapidly prospering moneylenders to build new temples without the permission of the Muslim zamindars of the *qasba* and to downgrade Muslim religious practices such as the procession of *tazias* at the Muharram while promoting their own practices and rituals. And support for the moneylenders on these occasions came not from the other Hindus of the town but from the landowning communities of the surrounding countryside, described as old enemies of the zamindars of Mubarakpur. By contrast, the 1904 riot involved no attack on the moneylenders: its targets were unequivocally 'religious'—two Hindu temples, one in Mubarakpur and the other in Gujarpar, a village to the north that was among those seen as traditionally hostile to Mubarakpur.⁶⁹

Among the immediate causes of this outbreak was the attempt made by some Brahmans to build a new shrine on waste land south of the main Mubarakpur temple. At the same time the weavers of Pura Sofi, one of the western *mohallas* of Mubarakpur, were building a small, unenclosed mosque by a tank in the open fields near the town. On Friday, 27 May 1904, two days before the riot, the *alim* conducting the prayers at the Juma Masjid read out a communication regarding the new shrine that the Hindus were trying to erect. On Saturday there was a meeting of the local Muslim zamindars (known as Milkis) and Muslim weavers, and the Brahmans erecting the shrine were called and told that they were building on land claimed by the Milkis. On the same day, a *mukhtar* practising in the Azamgarh courts who owned some land in Mubarakpur, visited the town and lodged a protest at the local police outpost regarding the building of the new shrine.

Early on the morning of Sunday, 29 May, the Julahas of Pura Sofi discovered that their unfinished mosque had been desecrated during the night. News of the outrage spread quickly, and was discussed in one or two mosques in Pura Sofi that morning. Parties of Julahas went out to consult the zamindars of the neighbouring village Sikhthi,

⁶⁹ Drake-Brockman, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-2; UP Regional Archives, Allahabad, COG (Gorakhpur), Judicial Azamgarh, vol. 68, File 47, 'Outbreak in the Town of Mubarakpur, Azamgarh 1845'; Mohammad Ali Hasan, 'Wakyat-o-hadesat: qasba Mubarakpur' (Urdu ms. of 1882. I owe thanks again to Qazi Atahar Mubarakpuri for allowing me to see this manuscript). For the 1904 riot, Abdul Majid's Diary, entry for 29 May 1904; and Gorakhpur Commissioner's Record Room, Dept XIII, File 63/1902-5, 'Serious outbreak at Mubarakpur'.

to urge the local police to take action, and to report the matter at the police station in Muhammadabad six miles away. Many weavers and some other Muslims gathered at the site of the defiled mosque and, with excitement mounting, some men fetched a large iron drum from the mosque at Sikhthi. Amidst growing calls for vengeance, the beating of the drum marked, as it were, the Muslim declaration of war.

The targets of attack appear to have been spontaneously chosen. The spires of the Gujarpar temples were plainly visible from where the crowd of Muslims stood; and the Chhatri zamindars of Gujarpar had taken a prominent part in the anti-cow killing agitation of 1893. The excited crowd moved in that direction. They seized a calf owned by a Chamar called Ram Charan from a small Chamar hamlet that lay in their path. Nearer their target, they climbed an outhouse belonging to one of the chief zamindars of Gujarpar and armed themselves with bamboos taken from its roof. The captured calf was then killed and thrown on the steps of a temple on the east of Gujarpar. Then the crowd turned towards Mubarakpur.

On their way south to the *qasba* the Julahas seized another calf from a Khatik, Daswant, who was beaten up for resisting. This calf was slung by its legs tied to a pole, and the march on Mubarakpur continued. In the town, more neighbours and friends were called upon to join, as cries went up for the wrecking of the Mubarakpur temple. At the temple, finally, the calf and a cow belonging to the priest were slaughtered, their blood being spilt all around; the temple chest was looted, the images smashed and the doors cut with knives to complete the desecration.

One needs only add that by the close of the nineteenth century the stereotype of the 'bigoted' and 'fanatical' Julaha was already well established, in part precisely because of the resistance of the Julahas in places like Mubarakpur to new attempts to accentuate the marks of their subordination.⁷⁰ In Mau and Kopaganj, too, to take the example of the other major cloth-manufacturing centres of Azamgarh, there were numerous instances of disagreement and strife between the weavers and other local groups in the course of the nineteenth century. And here, in 1893, the Julahas were prominent among the Muslims who came out to defend their *mohallas* against attacking crowds of Hindus on the day of the Baqr-Id.

⁷⁰ See my article, 'The bigoted Julaha' in *Review of Political Economy, Economic and Political Weekly* (forthcoming)

However, in a situation like that which was brought about by the Gaurakshini movement, in which Muslims at large became the targets of widespread and often indiscriminate Hindu attacks, *all* Muslims in such threatened areas tended to come together. What we have, then, in the Bhojpuri region is, on the one hand, a small religious community united periodically by its very isolation, and ranged against it on the other, a large Hindu force drawn primarily from the upper ranks of the caste hierarchy and from a few other castes, such as the Ahirs, Kurmis and Koeris who had by this time developed a special interest in the issue of cow-protection.

V *Symbols and Slogans of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' Unity*

It scarcely needs stating that the 'unity' described above, which cut across several castes and classes on each side, was built up on the basis of certain deeply shared religious concerns in this period. In the course of the development of their agitation in the 1880s and 1890s, the Gaurakshini Sabhas circulated numerous pamphlets, leaflets and pictures of the cow to drive home the sanctity of this particular symbol. This literature sought to emphasize that since all men drank the cow's milk, the cow was the universal mother and the killing of a cow matricide; and since all the gods dwelt in the cow (as several pictures suggested), cow-slaughter was the gravest insult to 'every Hindu'. Some of the pictures depicted a cow about to be killed by a butcher and members of the various Hindu castes standing around and crying out to him to desist. 'The effect of this symbolical teaching on the rustic mind may be readily conceived,' an official observed with typical superciliousness, 'and to the Hindu the symbol has in everything displaced the symbolised entity.'⁷¹

The same concern for the symbol was relayed by the *patias* or 'snowball letters' which each recipient was expected to send on to two or five, seven or twelve, or even twenty-five of his acquaintances, and which were circulated on a very large scale in the course of the agitation for cow-protection in the early 1890s and the 1910s. Only the tone of the message had become rather more urgent and aggressive. In Shahabad in 1917 some of the early *patias* originated at meetings in the Piru area attended by subordinate Hindu police officials as well as local zamindars and their agents, and were sent out to individual zamindars and other 'men of influence' in the vicinity, initially

⁷¹ L/P & J/3/96, 'Note on Agitation against Cow-killing', pp. 10-11.

through road *chaukidars* and other village policemen. But very quickly the 'snowball' function took over, and it proved difficult in the lengthy investigations that followed not only to trace where the various *patias* had originated and the lines along which they had been transmitted but even to lay hands on any significant number of them. However, the few *patias* that were found and still survive in the judicial records, merit a closer look. One of these reads as follows:

This *patia* comes from the world of the cow. It brings an entreaty to brother Hindus. The religion of the cow is being destroyed. What evil deed has she perpetrated that she should be killed by non-believers [literally, others]. We entreat our Hindu brothers to watch over the cow in every village and every house. If they do not, the cow will sadly breathe its last and leave the village[s]. If you see a Musalman with a cow, it is your duty [*dharma* which also means 'religion'] to take it from him. It is also your duty [religion] to write and send on five *patias*. If you do not you bear the guilt of cow-slaughter. But if you send it on you will receive a gift of 5 cows.

Another, headed 'Ramji', declared:

Hindus have no choice. You know that there is a quarrel [enmity] between Hindus and Muslims on the question of *qurbani*. And you know well that a Hindu has [or Hindus have – the local dialect leaves it unclear] been tied up and hung from a tree, and in *qurbani* villages [villages where *qurbani* customarily took place] the cow has been paraded about and then *qurbani* has been performed. This has brought great shame upon the Hindus, such shame that being alive is a curse. Therefore, you should loot the houses of Musalmans, kill the Musalmans and distribute 5 *patias* in the villages. If you do not distribute *patias*, and do not loot and kill [the Musalmans], then you do mount on your daughter. It would be better indeed to marry your mother to a Musalman. A few words [from us] should be enough to indicate all that needs to be done. If there are too many Musalmans for you to handle, send a message to the Maharaja of Dumraon and an armed force will arrive at once.

The German King, the Bengalis and the Chhatris are giving us great help and they say 'Fight, we shall be with you in no time'.⁷²

These two *patias* indicate the change that came about in the content of the 'Hindu' appeal as the riots progressed. The first of these is clearly from the earliest phase of the rising when the object was to protect cows and prevent cow-sacrifice. The second belongs to a later date, when cows had in fact been sacrificed in various places, the appeal had gone out for revenge against the Muslims and there had also been cases of Muslim resistance to Hindu crowds.

⁷² McPherson's Report, appended *patias* nos. 1 and 4 in Hindi (translation mine).

Other cases show more clearly still the assimilation into the short text of a *patia* of particular incidents which occurred during the disturbances. The *patias* sometimes also specified the times and places at which Hindu villagers were to gather with all available arms. Following a benediction from 'Mother Cow' to the Hindu brotherhood, one noted, for example, that 'in Bikramganj, [a] cow is lying bound for being killed. Hindus come to help to save the life of cow on kuar 3rd, dark fortnight, Wednesday. Those reading the letter should issue five letters'. Again as another *patia* reported, 'Hindu brothers are hiding Musalmans in their houses in Amjhar, Daudnagar, Alwar'.⁷³ But the basic pattern of all the *patias* was the same. They invoked the sanctity of the cow and impressed on Hindu villagers their duty, as Hindus, to preserve that sanctity. Invariably, too, they threatened dire consequences for those Hindus who refused to abide by their injunctions: they would commit a sin which was supposed to equal, in gravity, that incurred by the slaughter of one or more cows—the sin, for instance, of cohabiting with one's daughter or marrying one's sister to a Muslim.

Among Muslims there was naturally no less concern for the protection of their religious institutions and practices. Mubarakpur amply demonstrates the depth of Muslim feelings in this regard. In 1813 and 1842 when a handful of Hindu moneylenders were the primary targets of the Julahas' wrath, on some other occasions in the nineteenth century when tension grew and violence erupted between local Hindus and Muslims, and again in 1904 the spark was provided by the defilement of a mosque, an *imambarah*, a *tazia* platform. Revenge, too, often took the form of the defilement of symbols sacred to the Hindus. In 1813 and 1842, temples were attacked along with the houses and account-books of moneylenders.⁷⁴ But perhaps the clearest illustration of this point is provided by the 1904 riot referred to above.

The chief incidents on that occasion, it will be recalled, were the killing of a pig in a mosque on the outskirts of the town and, in answer, the killing of cows in two Hindu temples and the wrecking of the more important of these temples. This retaliatory move on the part of the Mubarakpur Muslims very quickly assumed the air of a triumphal procession; and it is perhaps worth noticing some of their actions that

⁷³ Ibid., *patias* nos. 7 and 3. [For other examples, see also *patias* translated in L/P & J/6/1507, Trials nos. 1 and 5 of 1917.

⁷⁴ See references cited in footnote 69 above.

As a symbolic of a successful revenge. In the course of their punitive expedition the *Jalahas* and other Muslims marched over four miles across open country, snatched two calves that they were subsequently to slaughter, damaged a little property in some outlying Hindu hamlets as well as inside the *qasba*, and killed one of the calves at the temple in Gujarpar (a mile and a half to the north of Mubarakpur). After this act of desecration they retired towards Mubarakpur allegedly 'with shouts of victory'. On this march the crowd seized the other calf, but then, finding it 'too small to travel', slung it up with its legs tied to a pole and carried it in procession. In the town, cries were raised for the wrecking of the temple located at its southern end. There, as noticed earlier, that calf and a cow were killed, the chest looted, images broken and the doors hacked to complete the ritual revenge. 'The temple cow', wrote the Judge in the court case that followed, 'had her throat cut and staggered round the "paikarma" or verandah spouting blood till she finally collapsed'; the walls and floors of the temple were 'literally bathed with blood'.⁷⁵ Yet it is to be noted that relatively little damage was done to any other property or person. On their march through the town, some of the rioters overturned a few Hindu traders' stalls and purloined sweets and other small items. Elsewhere, a Khatik was beaten for suspected complicity in the defilement of the mosque, two Dhobi boys were robbed near the Gujarpar temples, and a Chhatti lad who lived some distance away but was visiting the Mubarakpur market was manhandled. The temple priest was also badly beaten up. But with the killing of the cow and the two calves, and the wholesale desecration of the Mubarakpur temple, the task of revenge was seen as having been fulfilled.

Something of this Hindu and Muslim agitation over sectarian symbols—concern for cow-protection, anxiety for the preservation of practices enjoined by the *shariat* and so on—was of course evident long before the rise of the Cow-Protection movement. It was reflected for instance in the efforts of the Wahabis and Faraizis, on the one hand, and the various Hindu Samajes and reform movements, on the other, to 'purify' their respective religions and combat the powerful propaganda of the Christian missionaries earlier in the nineteenth

⁷⁵ Gorakhpur Commissioner's Record Room, Dept XIII, File 63/1902-5, 'Judgement' in Mubarakpur Riot Case, forwarded with Magistrate, Azamgarh to Commissioner, Gorakhpur Division, 5 Jan. 1905.

century; and these movements of revivalism and reform played no small part in deepening the consciousness of *different classes* of Indians as members of particular religious denominations.⁷⁶ We have already stressed the importance of these factors in contributing to the rise of movements for social mobility among groups like the Kurmis and Ahirs (among Hindus), the Zamindaras and Pathans (among Muslims). We have indicated too that the challenge posed by money-lenders, protected tenants and others to the upper-caste zamindari communities may have encouraged the latter to support movements of religious revival and 'purification'; and a similar argument can be put forward in the case of the substantial weaving community of the region whose economic insecurity, if not impoverishment, grew markedly in the nineteenth century. Yet if we are not to make the absurd assumption that economic decline necessarily leads to 'communalist' fervour in countries like India, we must examine more closely why men who felt economically and socially threatened came to be active in the fight for a ban on cow-slaughter or the right to practise *qurbani*.

VI Colonialism and Zamindari Status

We have observed that the classes most prominently involved in cow-protection activities and the resultant sectarian strife in the Bhojpuri region were urban and semi-urban professionals, traders, merchants and moneylenders, priests, zamindars and certain cultivating-tenant communities: to these one might add, for their leading role on the other side, the Muslim weavers (Julahas or Ansaris). Contemporary officials quickly summed up what they believed to be the motives behind the actions of some of these. The chief organizers of the Gaurakshini Sabhas in the towns, professionals and others whom the officials chose to call 'half-educated English-speaking agitators', were in their view pure mercenaries. Yet we know that young men who were even more readily put into this official category became active members of other public associations, patriotic societies and terrorist organizations that sprouted in various parts of northern India from the later nineteenth century onwards: torn from their village homes, scarcely absorbed in the courts and other colonial

⁷⁶ For a detailed account of the process among Bengali Muslims, see Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906. A Quest for Identity* (Delhi, 1981), *passim*.

institutions,⁷⁷ they would appear to have been looking for new ways of reinforcing their identity and self-respect.

The priests were regarded by the officials as a critical element, for without them the 'professional agitators' and the press would have no influence with the zamindars or the rest of the populace. As Macdonnell declared in 1893, 'One "Pahuari Baba" did more in the month to stir up disaffection [in Patna Division] than the whole Native Press has probably done in a year'. Or, as the District Magistrate of Azamgarh put it,

The Brahmans [= priests?] have everywhere lent their aid to the movement and are foremost in proclaiming the religious necessity of protecting the sacred cow. The spread of the movement is undoubtedly to their advantage as it gives them an opportunity of re-establishing their spiritual ascendancy on its former basis.⁷⁸

One could add that for these men—and the point of course applies not to the 'priests' alone—such activity might have been a mission as well as a source of livelihood.

As for the zamindars, 'the majority of them believe in the religious necessity of supporting the agitation. They blindly levy subscriptions from their tenants and deposit them with some fakir or fanatical zamindar'. Besides it was necessary for them to fight for the preservation of a dominant status that was slowly being eroded under the onslaughts of an assertive upper tenantry, trading castes like the Banias and Kalwars, and not least the colonial bureaucratic authority. However, the other side of this coin might have appeared at the turn of the century to be dominated by lower-status groups like the Ahirs, Koeris and Kurmis. Many of them were occupancy tenants who were gradually working their way into a competitive position and fighting for equal rights and an end to oppressive zamindari practices.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Cf. Marx, 'Alongside of modern evils, a whole series of inherited evils oppress us, arising from the passive survival of antiquated modes of production, with their inevitable train of social and political anachronisms. We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead.' Preface to the 1st edition of *Capital*, vol. I (New York, 1906), p. 13.

⁷⁸ 'Confidential Correspondence' of A. P. Macdonnell, letter to Forbes, 9 Nov. 1893; Dupernex's Report, p. 18, from which the next quotation also comes.

⁷⁹ Apart from Section II above, see F. W. Porter, *Final Settlement Report of the Allahabad District* (Allahabad, 1878), pp. 47-8; and for examples of struggle in Shahabad during the Survey and Settlement operations of 1907-16, Hubback, *Final Settlement Report*, paras 171-80 and 472; Robb, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

A parallel clash would seem to have been developing between the trader-moneylender and the artisans in the towns, though here the former had by the second half of the nineteenth century established their economic ascendancy rather more decisively.

In the case of this 'urban' confrontation it seems possible to trace some of the reasons why sectarian symbols should have become symbols of authority and focal points of strife: and a consideration of these may provide some clues for understanding the factors that worked towards a similar end in the 'rural' sector too. We may begin with the Muslim weaving community, concentrated in and around a number of old weaving towns, buffeted about and oppressed by several new forces in the colonial period. The evidence suggests that this experience, perhaps more than the fact that they were the object of a good deal of revivalist and other propaganda in the towns, lay directly behind many of their acts of protest in the nineteenth century. The targets of the weavers' attacks during the 1813 and 1842 riots in Mubarakpur were surely not an accidental choice. Indeed in the enquiries that followed the 1842 riot for which the surviving records are fairly detailed, various pieces of evidence came to light regarding the specific causes of friction leading to this outbreak.

While the houses of five moneylenders were raided by the Mubarakpur weavers, their principal targets were Bichuk Kalwar and his relative Bhawani Prasad whose houses were not only plundered but burnt, without a care for those trapped inside. We know little about the exact dealings, the pressures and humiliations that lay behind this attack. But it was noted by the District Magistrate, Craigee, after his detailed investigations in the town, that Bichuk Kalwar had 'by great care, pecuniousness, and usury raised himself to be a dabbler in Mahajunee'. By 1842 he was clearly a man of some wealth and had in his debt those whom Craigee described, in another charming example of colonial perception, as 'several of the reckless and profligate Mussulman Weavers of Mobaruckpoor'. Without doubt, the Magistrate noted, Bichuk was 'a hard unrelenting creditor'.⁸⁰ All of which perhaps helps to explain the march on Bichuk's house and the bonfire made of the *tamasooks* (bonds) that Bichuk held against the weavers, before the house itself was set on fire.

But there was evidently more to the attack than the burning of

⁸⁰ COG (Gorakhpur), Judicial, Azamgarh, vol. 68, File 47, Craigee, Magistrate, Azamgarh to Offg Commissioner, Benares, 25 March 1842.

tamasooks and the wreaking of vengeance on a cruel upstart. There was the killing of a cow whose body was then thrown into the Hindu *shivalaya*. It is necessary to remember, too, that the discovery of a dead pig on one of their *imambarahs* had provided the immediate spark for this explosion of Muslim anger. Eight years earlier the placing of a pig's carcass on the Panj-i-Sharif had led to a similar agitation on the part of the Julahas and the murder of a Hindu *barkandaz* (armed policeman) who went out to investigate, although the situation was then brought under control.⁸¹ What had the exploitation of a Hindu moneylender to do with these attacks?

In this connection, again, the enquiries made after the 1842 outbreak threw up some interesting evidence. Bichuk Kalwar, we learn, was not only 'a hard unrelenting creditor'. To this cause of unpopularity he added 'a superlative fanaticism in matters concerning his own creed and an ultra-enmity in those opposed to it'. At each Mohurrum 'he endeavours to throw discredit on their [the Muslims'] faith and obstacles in the way of their Tazeeahs'.⁸² There had indeed been a long history of friction over the size of the *tazias* in the Mohurrum procession for many years before this.

In 1835 Bichuk and a fellow *mahajan*, Babu Ramdas, had built a wall on the road and thus created an obstruction in the way of the procession of *tazias*. In April 1838 Bichuk complained to the Azamgarh Magistrate that the *thanadar* (police station officer) of Mubarakpur had for the past three years removed some tiles from the wall in order to allow the *tazias* to pass. The Magistrate, while giving the *thanadar* credit for his good intentions, directed that he should in future not remove tiles but get the Muslims to reduce the size of the *tazias* if they wished to pass that way. This order was somehow enforced in 1839 and 1840. In 1841 a complaint was registered with the police accusing a Julaha of having forced the *tazias* through: if the Hindu landlords had not removed some tiles, it was said, the consequences would certainly have been most serious. It was in the wake of the tension thus generated that the 1842 outburst occurred a few days after the Mohurrum of that year.

⁸¹ Ibid., Correspondence of 1834-5; Mohammad Ali Hasan, op. cit., 9th 'Event' famous as 'Bicchuk Shahi', pp. 35-7.

⁸² COG (Gorakhpur), Judicial Azamgarh, vol. 68, File 47, Craigee's letter of 25 March 1842. The following account is based on the reports and correspondence, from 1834 to 1844, contained in this file.

It is worth noting that the vengeance of 1842 did not mark an end to this dispute, for the basic cause of the quarrel remained. In 1842 violence had been averted on the occasion of the Mohurrum only by the detention of Bichuk Kalwar in Azamgarh town ('to prevent a disturbance' and 'to save his life'), and by the presence of the officiating Magistrate, Robert Tucker, in Mubarakpur where he walked behind the main *tazia* almost all the way on both the principal days of the festival. In 1843 and 1844 too the festival passed off peacefully. On the former occasion the officiating Magistrate was again present in Mubarakpur and saw that the *tazias* were carried by another route; on the latter, this alternative route was again followed and a Joint Magistrate and a small mounted force were present. However, the Muslim inhabitants who were consulted by the administration still described Bichuk and Ramdas's encroachments as the fundamental cause of ill-feeling in the town. In 1844, then, the administration began to make efforts to get the *mahajans* to knock down the wall and restrict their construction work to the original limits. In December 1844, they finally succeeded in having the 'obnoxious portion' of the buildings removed with the owners' consent and without any disturbance. It is perhaps significant that there was no other serious affray between the Hindus and Muslims of Mubarakpur for the rest of the century. The next major outbreak, in 1904, came at the end of a period when a whole range of outside forces and movements had entered the local arena, though they fed also on old rivalries and tensions in the area.

The aggressiveness of Bichuk Kalwar and Babu Ramdas was part of a widespread effort by traders and moneylenders to assert their still relatively new-found position near the apex of society. Rikhei Sahu, the *mahajan* killed in the earlier riot of 1813, had built a 'grand' house in the first years of the century, the like of which, it was said, 'was not to be found anywhere else in Azamgarh': the building is still referred to in Mubarakpur as 'the house'. Bichuk, again, had built what was described as a 'splendid' two-storied house for himself and his family not long before the outbreak of 1842.⁸³

⁸³ Mohammad Ali Hasan, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10, 35. The author refers time and again to the haughtiness of the *mahajans* derived from their growing wealth. Blunt identifies among the two or three instances in which changes in caste are due to increased prosperity 'the case of the prosperous Kalwar who insists on calling himself Mahajan', *UP Census, 1911*, pt. I, p. 352.

The assertion of a superior status could proceed through the construction of grand houses, the buying up of land and the adoption of a zamindari style. It could be signalled by conspicuous participation in the Great Tradition of religion; say, the erection of a new temple. It would be demonstrated, too, by the performance of ceremonies, the observance of festivals only as the 'men of position' wanted it—that is, under their benevolent eye and within the limits prescribed by them.⁸⁴ It is in this light that one can understand the harassment felt by Nazir Beg, a descendant of the original *maliks* of Ibrahimpur in Shahabad district, when Shyam Sundar Lal and Jamuna Sahu, the 'new' zamindars of the village, began, among other things, to 'interfere with the long established custom of *qurbani* in his house and mosque'.⁸⁵ Thus, too, might we follow the perverse reasoning of the Chauhan Rajput zamindars of Katarpur in Saharanpur district who upbraided their leader, Harnam Singh, when the latter 'publicly admitted' (in a discussion with local officials and Muslim leaders in 1918) that *qurbani* had been performed in Katarpur at the Baqr-Id for some years past: 'You are the owner of three-quarters share [of the village] and you are causing such a thing to occur [i.e. acknowledging that *qurbani* had been performed in the Chauhans' village]... Go and drown yourself.'⁸⁶

In the old cloth-manufacturing town of Mau and in other places, as in Mubarakpur, though the records are not equally explicit everywhere, the nineteenth century saw much jostling between the different classes over the symbols of authority and status. Clashes between various parties of Hindus and Muslims broke out in Mau at the beginning of the century, when a long-established ban on cow-slaughter in the town was brought into question by the coming of the new colonial authority armed with its own particular prejudices against local customs. The Banaras Court of Circuit, which tried the cases that arose out of these 'riots', recommended the extension of the earlier ban on cow-slaughter in Mau; and orders to this effect

⁸⁴ There is a considerable anthropological and historical literature on these themes: see, for instance, H. Sanyal, 'Temple Promotion and Social Mobility in Bengal' in his *Social Mobility in Bengal*; C. A. Bayly, 'Patrons and Politics in Northern India' in Gallagher, *et al.* (eds), *Locality, Province and Nation. Essays on Indian Politics, 1870-1940* (Cambridge, 1973). Satyajit Ray's film 'Jalsaghar' is a caustic comment on this process of change and the difference between 'old' and 'new' zamindars.

⁸⁵ See footnote 39 above.

⁸⁶ India Office Records, L/P & J/6/1557 of 1918, Judgement in Katarpore Riot Case.

were issued in mid-1808. From then until 1862 or 1863, as a petition addressed by several leading Hindus of the town to the British authorities in 1893 put it, there was 'no dispute' between the two communities.⁸⁷ It is to be noted too that the renewal of strife in the 1860s began with the erection of a new temple in October 1862. This was perhaps seen as a further assertion of power by moneylenders and other rich Hindus, and hotly contested by the Julahas and other local Muslims as having no customary sanction. Indeed it is tempting to suggest that this attempted 'extension of authority' and the revival of quarrels over the question of cow-slaughter was associated with the exceptional dearness of grain and the very depressed circumstances of the cloth trade at this time, conditions that harboured the distinct possibility of a still tighter stranglehold by Hindu traders and financiers over the Muslim weavers; it was after all in 1863 that the Mau Julahas told the Commissioner of Banaras Division that they would make 'the finest quality cloth' available at a cheaper rate than the coarser varieties,⁸⁸ so great indeed was the cost of the raw material and so little the value of their skills in the existing situation.

The years after 1862 were marked by long and widespread conflict in Mau: Muslim opposition to the building of the new temple, Hindu retaliation through the defilement of a mosque, friction over the killing of cows by Muslims inside their homes for purposes of food, and petitions and complaints that 'poured in on all sides'. By 1865 the

⁸⁷ 'Petition of Hindu Inhabitants of Mhow, to Secretary of State for India in Council' (n.d. 1893?). (I am grateful to Shri D. N. Pandey of Mau, Azamgarh, for permitting me to consult this document which is preserved in the library of his late father, a prominent Hindu gentlemen of the town.) The following account of events in Mau is based chiefly on this petition, and its Appendices, which provide detailed extracts from government reports and Judgements relating to conflicts in Mau.

⁸⁸ *Selections from the Records of Government, North-Western Provinces, Part XL* (Allahabad, 1864), Article IV, 'Information Regarding the Slackness of Demand for European Cotton Goods', p. 148. We may note in this context, too, that in the criminal prosecutions that followed the Mau riots of 1893, the great majority of those accused who belonged to Mau were described as 'shopkeepers of the Bania class'. Most of them were implicated in the second fight in Mau and the attack on 6 Muslims who were killed on the spot. The witnesses were relatives of those killed and two or three Julahas in each case, whose testimony the Judge considered highly suspect. Yet the accusations, if not the actions of the traders, are a plain indication of the tension that had grown up between the weavers and the traders-moneylenders. Gorakhpur Commissioner's Record Room Dept XVI, File 37/1898-1900, Judgement of 14 Feb. 1894 in Mau Riot Case.

Magistrate of Azamgarh had proclaimed his inability to keep order in the town 'by the ordinary means at his disposal' and applied to the government for additional police. Then, or perhaps a little later, punitive police were quartered on the town at the expense of the Hindus for their attacks on local Muslims in connection with cow-slaughter.⁸⁹

The example of Mau reveals another factor that was of considerable significance in the growing conflicts over various sectarian symbols and practices. This might be described, simply, as the destabilization of custom, a process encouraged by the very fact of the colonial attempt to record the latter. The importance of such destabilization is evident from the outbreak of clashes in Mau in 1806, only five years after the East India Company had taken over the administration of the region and it had become uncertain as to whether the old ban on cow-slaughter in the town remained effective. In the 1860s again, self-contradictory official orders, amidst all the current jostling for economic and social advantage, added to the tension. In January and February 1863 the Azamgarh Magistrate, Henry Lushington, declared that the Muslims were free to kill cows behind closed doors, while at the same time binding down a number of people on both sides to keep the peace for twelve months. However on receiving a petition from Hindu inhabitants, he was persuaded to reverse his order in March 1863:

Although it did not at first appear probable that the killing of kine should have been altogether forbidden, ... it appears that in fact ever since the time of the Nawab Vazir, the killing of cows, calves and bullocks was forbidden in this city. ... Accordingly this notification of the prohibitory order of the Government is now again issued and no one of the Musalman faith should attempt to kill, or actually kill, cows, calves and bullocks in this city of Mhow.⁹⁰

Muslim appeals against this decision were rejected by an officiating Magistrate and the District Judge. But in October 1864 a Joint Magistrate, Richards, acquitted a number of Julahas charged with the slaughter of a cow on the ground that the cow was killed for food,

⁸⁹ 'Petition of Hindu Inhabitants of Mhow', Appx F (Azamgarh District, Criminal, 1885, Court of F. B. Mullock, Crown vs. Bhitan, Jitan, sons of Gharhie Bhangi and Ismail, son of Hisamuddin Nurba); Dupernex's Report, p. 25.

⁹⁰ 'Petition of Hindu Inhabitants of Mhow', Appx C(a), 'Notification issued by Magistrate, Azamgarh, 20 March 1863'.

inside a house, with no intention of wounding the religious feelings of the Hindus. There followed, in quick succession, a number of cases against Hindus charged with assaulting Muslims on the issue of cow-slaughter. In all of these Richards convicted the accused, holding that Muslims were free to slaughter kine for food, while the Judge, Ross, holding the opposite view, persistently acquitted them on appeal. The sole exception to this pattern was a case in which the Judge upheld a heavy prison sentence against some Hindus for forcibly appropriating a cow from its Muslim owner, when no cow-slaughter had actually occurred, and when there was no proof that the cow in question had been intended for slaughter.

Then in 1865 sanction for the establishment of a slaughter house where kine might be killed 'without offence to the Hindus' was given, apparently because the dearness of grain had greatly increased the pressure on the poor Muslims of the town. This, in the view of some at least in the administration, 'finally' settled the question of whether cows could be killed in Mau for food. Yet leading members of the local Hindu community did not quietly accept this decision. They appealed against it all the way up to the Lieutenant-Governor of the province, the Viceroy of India and the Secretary of State for India in Council. They argued that the erection of a slaughter-house in 1865 was an emergency measure, necessitated by hard times and accepted by the community beyond what they claimed was the originally sanctioned period of one year, only because the Hindus had no objection to the killing of buffaloes and other animals, but not cows, for food.

In 1885 Mullock, then Magistrate of Azamgarh, while convicting three Muslims of Mau for the public killing of a cow, expressed his own opinion that the original government order of 1808 prohibited the slaughter of kine for sacrifice alone, and not for food. To this the Hindus replied that it was obviously not the government's intention in 1808 to ban cow-slaughter 'once or twice a year and to allow it all the year round'. It was not relevant either, they added in response to other official arguments, whether Mau had a larger Hindu or Muslim population or, again, whether or not it was a place of special sanctity to the Hindus. What was at issue was 'an old custom sanctioned by the Mahomedan rulers' which had been the basis of peace between Hindus and Muslims through the better part of even the nineteenth century. 'The peace of the whole town of Mhow mainly depends

upon a just and equitable decision of this question.⁹¹ But the bureaucracy, whether because of a felt need to do everything to mollify the 'Muslim' interest in the face of what they saw as a rising 'Hindu nationalism', or because a decision had been taken at the local level and the steel-frame had to be shown to be without cracks, paid no further attention. It was in this situation that important elements of the Hindu community in and around Mau were swept on a wave of anger, as it were, into the rising tide of militant Hinduism in northern India.

It needs to be noted, again, that an official effort to 'record custom' relating to the practice of *qurbani* in Azamgarh appears to have sparked off the Hindu demonstrations at the Baqr-Id of 1893. On 8 June that year the officiating Magistrate of Azamgarh, Dupernex, directed that the Muslims of all villages in which there was danger of disturbance should report at their respective police stations before 15 June whether they intended to perform *qurbani*. The order which, apparently, was supposed to be communicated only to villages where the police apprehended trouble, was in fact conveyed to all parts of the district, and 426 Muslims 'gave notice' of their intention to make a ritual sacrifice of cattle (347 cows and 79 buffaloes).

On 8 June, Dupernex issued yet another order directing the 'leading Hindus and Muhammadans' of 'villages in which disturbances were anticipated' to appear before a magistrate, 'so that it might be settled in what villages sacrifice should take place'. Hindus and Muslims from numerous villages then appeared before various magistrates, and 'in all but a very few cases' (as the official summary had it) recorded their willingness to adhere to 'established custom', neither sacrificing nor objecting to sacrifice 'in contravention of usage'.⁹²

This inept official interference certainly stoked the fires of Hindu, or to be more precise Gaurakshini, wrath. For it is beyond doubt that after the riots a wide body of Hindu opinion expressed a sense of outrage at the officials' meddling with traditional practices. The *Dainik-o-Samachar Chandrika* of 7 September 1893 observed that Dupernex's notice 'which contained a list of the villages in which cow-slaughter takes place every year, and indulged in surmises as to the places where such slaughter was likely to produce disturbances this year, was published in every village in Azamgarh, and no wonder

⁹¹ Ibid. These arguments are put forward in the main body of the petition.

⁹² *East India Religious Disturbances*, pp. 18-19.

that it alarmed the Hindus on the one hand, and encouraged the Musalmans on the other'.

Earlier on 21 August, the same paper had noted the view held by 'many people' in Azamgarh that the Baqr-Id riots were the consequence of the granting of licences for the slaughter of cows 'in Mau and the adjoining places, where cow-slaughter was not allowed since the time of Akbar'. A day later it declared: 'It was the undue encouragement given by the officials to the slaughter of cows by the Musalmans that brought about the disturbances.' The view that the blame for the June events rested squarely on the officials was widely espoused in the wake of the riots. 'Messrs. Brunyate [an Assistant Magistrate] and Dupernex have committed an offence whose enormity nothing can exceed', wrote the *Banganivasi* on 11 August, 'if, being Government officers, they have really incited the Musalmans to cow-slaughter. . . . It is said that the [Dupernex] compelled a Hindu tahsildar, a Hindu Deputy Collector, a Hindu Police Inspector, and even several Hindu *raises* to witness cow-slaughter. On what principle of justice or policy can this act be justified?'⁹³

Indeed many sections of the Hindu press in northern India now expressed a complete loss of faith in the impartiality and justice of the administration of the North-Western Provinces and Awadh (later UP) headed by the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Charles Crosthwaite, though some retained their trust in 'the Maharani' and the Viceroy. One wrote of 'a close compact' between the Muslims and the British evident in the manner the judicial enquiries were being pursued in Azamgarh, Ballia, Bareilly and other places, while another wrote of the 'oppression' let loose on the Hindu population by Muslim police officers backed by the British.⁹⁴

It may be recalled here that in Shahabad in 1917 it was the performance of *qurbani* in Milki, Bhagalpur and Ibrahimpur under official supervision and in spite of some reluctance on the part of the local Muslims that changed the course of the riot, transforming what was supposed to be a localized demonstration into a savage affair marked by widespread loot and murder. Indeed, the point assumes special significance in the light of the *Banganivasi's* views, quoted

⁹³ L/P & J/3/96, 'Note on Agitation against Cow-killing', Appendix (extracts from the vernacular press), pp. 6, 7, 8, 9, 13.

⁹⁴ *Dainik-o-Samachar Chandrika*, 13 Sept. 1893; *Sulabh Dainik*, 12 Sept. 1893; also *Sahachar*, 9 Aug. 1893, all in *ibid.*, pp. 4, 10, 11.

above, about the incitement of Muslims by government officers to sacrifice cows. It may be recalled, too, that it was in a situation very like that of Azamgarh in 1893 that the Chauhan Rajputs of Katarpur (Saharanpur district) declared, a quarter of a century later, that *qurbani* could never have taken place in their village.

As in Katarpur, so (with the Hindu and Muslim positions reversed) in the Muslim *qasba* of Mubarakpur, there was an insistence all the way up to and including the period under study that the assent of the local zamindars was required for all religious, if not social, innovations. Moreover, what lay behind the Muslim actions in Mubarakpur were the feelings, resentments and aspirations of another closely knit community, namely the Julahas or Ansaris who now turned to the Sheikh zamindars for leadership.⁹⁵ Among the Hindus in the Bhojpuri region, who were neither isolated nor small in numbers, there was no clear-cut alliance of this sort. But in their fight for cow-protection the agitating groups from zamindari and other privileged backgrounds found support among various peasant communities struggling to establish their own 'higher' status. It was thus that until the First World War, if not later, the Muslims of Mubarakpur, like the Chauhan Rajputs of Katarpur and other communities elsewhere, demonstrated their continued and often increased readiness to rise in defence of institutions and practices that had come to symbolize for them their ascendancy and/or their self-respect. Frequently the consequences were bloody.

VII *Some Conclusions Regarding 'Communalism'*

Extended and bloody sectarian strife of the kind witnessed in the Bhojpuri region from the 1880s to the 1910s was certain to leave its mark. In an age of increasingly rapid and far-flung communications, a considerably expanded section of the Hindu and Muslim 'communities' was affected by the reports and rumours of the period—of the brutalities perpetrated in Mau (Azamgarh) or the terror unleashed in Shahabad. The repercussions of the Azamgarh events of 1893 were felt almost immediately in Bombay and Junagadh: Julaha migrants were to the fore in the Bombay riots which aimed at least in part to avenge the deaths of their brethren in north India. The ripples of the

⁹⁵ I try to analyse more closely the contradictions and tendencies existing in Mubarakpur in the nineteenth century, in a forthcoming paper in R. Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Culture*, vol. III.

Kanpur mosque incident of 1913 reached out to distant Lahore. And the outrages committed by the Hindus of Shahabad in 1917 were remembered, and to some extent emulated with vengeance by Muslim migrants from this region on the streets of Calcutta in 1918.⁹⁶ Thus it appears that Hindus and Muslims of several classes scattered over a much wider geographical area than the site of any initial act of violence, were drawn into their respective religious community's concern for cow-protection or for *qurbani*.

However, there was nothing, yet, in the nature of a permanent Hindu-Muslim divide. That was contingent on a clearer political articulation yet to come at the provincial and national levels. When it eventually happened, that articulation, encouraged directly and indirectly by the colonial regime, particularly in the case of the Muslim League, fed of course on the suspicions and fears which grew out of sectarian agitations and clashes such as those we have discussed above. Yet even in the worst affected regions like that of the Bhojpuri-speaking people, this kind of strife did not inevitably or automatically lead to 'communalism'. The contradictions in the locality remained many-sided, and it would be difficult to argue that the confrontation between Hindu and Muslim was the primary one among them.

That so much of the sectarian strife of the 1890s and 1910s involved a clash chiefly between a number of the higher Hindu castes and a small and isolated Muslim community is a fact that is not easily brushed aside. The example of Katarpur village in the western UP district of Saharanpur provides another sharp illustration of this, if further illustration is needed. We have noticed above the indignation of the local Rajput zamindars at the public acknowledgement in 1918 that *qurbani* had ever been performed in their village. This indignation quickly led to the use of force to prevent the *qurbani*. In the preparations for this the Chauhans were advised and assisted by professional men, merchants and priests from the nearby centres of pilgrimage at Hardwar and Kankhal. Then, at Baqr-Id in September 1918, thirty

⁹⁶ In three days of rioting in Bombay, 80 people were killed, 1,500 arrested, and 33 temples, mosques and shops damaged or destroyed, according to official figures, McLane, *op. cit.*, pp. 320-1. For Lahore and Calcutta see respectively R. Kumar, 'The Rowlatt Satyagraha in Lahore', in R. Kumar (ed.), *Essays on Gandhian Politics* (Oxford, 1971), p. 271; and K. MacPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta, 1918-35* (Wiesbaden, 1974), pp. 37, 40.

Muslims of Katarpur were butchered to death by a large crowd of Hindus belonging to that village as well as to the towns of Hardwar and Kankhal and other villages nearby—a calamity that the small police force present there could apparently do nothing to prevent. The caste background of the 165 men subsequently brought to trial and found guilty of participation in the riot in all but 20 cases, is significant. Of them as many as 50 were Chauhan Rajputs. The rest included 24 Brahmans, 17 Baniyas, 14 Sainis, 7 Mahants or priests (of whom three were sentenced to death), 6 Jats, 6 Khattris, 4 Kayasths, 4 Kalals, 4 Gosains, 4 Banjaras—all of these being men of the zamindari, trading and priestly communities—and smaller numbers from other castes. The largest number of the accused came, not surprisingly, from Katarpur itself. As many as 33 of its inhabitants were prosecuted. 27 of them were Chauhans, and the others are very likely to have been of the category of personal servants or direct dependants.⁹⁷ Limited though the evidence is, it nevertheless suggests a general aloofness on the part of the lower castes even in Katarpur (a village inhabited by 538 Hindus and 238 Muslims in 1911) from such defence of 'Hindu' interests.

There is yet another dimension to all this. The occasional convergence of interest between various upper and lower castes and occupational groups cannot be viewed in isolation. The joint actions between the Ahirs, Koeris, and Kurmis on the one hand and the zamindari castes of the Bhojpuri region, namely, the Rajputs, Bhumihars and Brahmans on the other, did not promote any long-term perception of identity of interests. On the contrary, by their movements for upward mobility the various cultivating castes aroused bitter antagonism on the part of the landowning classes, leading them into organized opposition to the lower-caste movements. It is worth stressing, too, that the resulting compact between the upper classes of the region cut across the religious divide, with Muslim and Hindu zamindars joining hands. Thus in February 1921, certain Muslim zamindars of Bihar subdivision in Patna district instituted a number of cases against the Gwalas who were now refusing to supply them with ghee, curds, etc., at rates lower than those in the market. Later, an anti-Gwala movement was organized by 'upper caste' zamindars, its first meeting being held in October 1922 in the house of a Muslim zamindar, Maulvi Muhammad Wali. 'The organizer of this movement', Hetukar

⁹⁷ L/P & J/6/1557, correspondence and 'Judgement'.

Rallying round the Cow

Jha tells us, 'was also a Muhammadan (Maulvi Muhammad Masood of Marija) . . . a zamindar of some influence and a non-cooperation leader'.⁹⁸

The consequence of this upper-caste counter-agitation was liable to be violent. For instance, local zamindars gathered a large force to break up an 'important' Gwala panchayat called to discuss matters of caste improvement in the village of Lakho Chak in Monghyr district on 27 May 1925. In Muzaffarpur in 1923, 'the annoyance caused to the higher castes by the determination of Goalas, Koeris, Kurmis, etc., to wear the sacred thread and to attach "Singh", "Rai" to their names' culminated in two riots in the Shoohar and Belsand *thanas*. In Darbhanga the move by local Gwalas to wear the sacred thread, following the example of their fraternity in Muzaffarpur and Patna districts, brought them into collision with the Brahmans and Babhans and resulted in a riot in Chak Salem village in 1922. 'The Babhans who disliked the idea of the Goalas claiming to be their equal assaulted a Goala girl and left her naked. She lodged a complaint before the S.D.O. [Sub-Divisional Officer] at Samastipur who dismissed it without enquiry'.⁹⁹ Resistance and further violence followed. It was a pattern of conflict, and of humiliation inflicted on the lower classes, that has lasted to the present day.

Some kind of compact between Hindu and Muslim re-emerged, too, at levels other than that of the zamindars. The weaving town of Mau which had experienced the fiercest of sectarian upheavals, indicates this well. The need for co-existence and peace between people of the two religious denominations was obvious. The economic well-being of the weavers and the trader-moneylenders remained to a large extent interlinked, and the idea of a separate Muslim state—to which most Muslims of the region would in any case never migrate—was still to be conceived. The excesses of 1893 produced a sense of shame among some of the local Hindu leaders and led at the same time to increased government efforts to bring about agreements between the representatives of the local Hindus and Muslims and to extend precautionary measures. They seemed, thereby, to have transformed the situation in Azamgarh district within the space of a year. 'The Baqr-Id of 1894 has passed off with perfect tranquil[l]ity in this district', H. V. Lovett, the officiating Magistrate at Azamgarh

⁹⁸ Jha, *op. cit.*, p. 550

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 551-3.

reported. 'There has been no disturbance of even the smallest kind.' Rose, the officiating Commissioner of the Division who had made it a point to be present in Azamgarh at the time of the festival, seconded Lovett's statement: 'The attitude of the two communities appeared to me . . . one of toleration and peace. There were no symptoms of any sullen resentment or of any aggressive policy.'¹⁰⁰

Rose was instrumental earlier, as the new Magistrate for Azamgarh appointed after the 1893 riots, in having pledges written up and signed by 'resident leaders' in most of the villages and towns where serious clashes and demonstrations had taken place: Mau, Kopaganj, Adri, Azmatgarh, Khairuddinpur and so on. At Mau, a very special effort had been put in. A conciliation committee of ten Hindus and ten Muslims was set up, Muslims nominating the Hindu members and vice versa. Rai Durga Prasad of Gorakhpur, proprietor of Kopaganj, came and stayed in Mau for several days to assist in peace-making. Large meetings were held at Kopa and Mau in February 1894, attended by Hindus and Muslims of both the towns and the surrounding areas. At the second meeting twenty copies of an agreement were signed and distributed among the members of the Mau conciliation committee, who were asked to obtain signatures from the inhabitants of the town after Rose had returned to headquarters. By this agreement, which was in line with those made elsewhere in the district, the local Hindus and Muslims bound themselves neither to interfere in the religious practices of the other community nor to introduce any change in the established customs. The Mau agreement stated in addition that the signatories would endeavour to implement it throughout the district and that they wished it to be printed and a copy sent to the headman of every village in Azamgarh.

About a month after the above meetings Rose received the last of the copies of this agreement, which had been signed by 877 Hindus and 745 Muslims of Mau. In the meantime, another small but significant event had occurred. Returning from Mau after the February meeting, Rose was met at Khurhunt by one of the principal Muslim members of the Mau conciliation committee, Maulvi Karim Baksh, who came to him at night and handed over a number of swords. These were among the illicit arms known to have been owned by some of the Julahas of Mau. The surrender of those fourteen swords

¹⁰⁰ N.W.P. and Oudh, General Dept, Progs for Aug. 1894, Progs Nos. 95 & 96 (Rose's letter of 22 June 1894 and Lovett's of 19 June 1894), contained in Gorakhpur Commissioner's Record Room, Dept XVI, File 37/1898-1900.

to the Magistrate, in spite of the punitive police tax imposed at the time on the weavers of the town,¹⁰¹ was further evidence of a renewed will to secure communal harmony.

None of this is to suggest that the 'religiosity' of the Bhojpuri folk had been diluted or the disagreement and tension over sectarian matters ended. The 1904 outbreak in Mubarakpur, the Faizabad events of 1912-13, and Shahabad in 1917 would quickly set right any delusions on that score. But the fact remains that our understanding of the history of Hindu-Muslim relations in the locality is unlikely to be enhanced by maintaining a narrow perspective on friction between the two 'communities'.

Finally, two other points perhaps call for some special emphasis. The first is one with which this essay began, that is, the need to avoid the conflation of different definitions of 'communalism'. The second is that, in spite of the history of such bitter clashes between Hindus and Muslims in the 1890s and the 1910s, 'communalism' was far from being the *only*, or indeed the *logical* outcome of the complex pattern of developments in the Bhojpuri region. On both these scores it may be relevant here to refer to Francis Robinson's conclusion reached after an extremely detailed investigation into the origins of Muslim separatist politics in north India to the effect that 'eastern UP and Awadh' (which covers most of the Bhojpuri region) was a region of 'communal harmony' up to 1923 while 'communalism' was already rampant in western UP.¹⁰² If the evidence of large-scale strife associated with cow-protection activities appears to fly in the face of such a view, that is a reflection, we suggest, of an often unacknowledged disjunction between the organized sphere of politics that is Robinson's exclusive concern, and the organization and resistance of local communities such as Julahas, Ahirs and Chauhan Rajputs, that we have been examining here. Precisely because of the overlap between the two and the obvious influences that flowed either way, no satisfactory history of Hindu-Muslim relations or of 'communalism' in India can be written without a recognition and close analysis of these autonomous domains of political action.

¹⁰¹ For the above, see *ibid.*, Resolution, General Dept no. 394/III-461 B of 1894 (Allahabad, 29 Mar. 1894), which reproduces letter no. 197/XIII-215, Rose, Magistrate Azamgarh to Commissioner, Gorakhpur Division, 8 Mar. 1894.

¹⁰² Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 79ff; also his 'Municipal Government and Muslim Separatism in UP, 1883-1926', in Gallagher *et al.* (eds.), *op. cit.*

Quit India in Bihar and the Eastern United Provinces: The Dual Revolt¹

STEPHEN HENNINGHAM

‘Towards the close of the year, on Aug 9 1942 an unparalleled congress rebellion of terrible magnitude reared its head and within a week crippled and paralysed the Govt.’

Manager, Padri Circle, Raj Darbhanga, (n.d.).

‘the school students started the movement; they were joined by all sections of Congress workers. The sober section of Congress tried to keep the movement under control, but when they allowed the village mass to join, it became an economic question: the vast properties, specially foodgrains at the railway station attracted them. . . . Of the villagers the Bhumihars and the poor labourers took prominent part in the loot . . . [by 14 August] the situation was completely out of the hands of the students: the looters got complete upperhand: in order to keep the hold the younger section of the Congress began to support the action of the looters and even joined: the sober section did not approve it but they had no hold at the time.’

Beguserai Subdivisional Officer, 22 December 1942

‘In the month of August last there was an unprecedented congress movement in this sub division. The Sub Divisional officer and several Sub Inspectors of Police were murdered. . . . There was no agitation whatsoever against the Raj and in spite of the above movement Raj works were never suspended.’

Manager, Parihar Circle, Raj Darbhanga, 1 August 1943

¹ In the preparation of this essay I have benefited greatly from the advice and criticism of Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ranajit Guha, Gail Pearson, Pauline Rule, Brian Stoddart and James Wise.

I

In 1942 a massive revolt swept across India. It began on 8 August when the All-India Congress Committee (A.I.C.C.) called for mass civil disobedience to force the British to 'Quit India'. The British reacted with speed and force: they declared the Indian National Congress an illegal organization, shut down its offices and printing presses, confiscated its records and funds, and arrested its more prominent leaders. The attack on the Congress sparked off angry demonstrations, with which the police dealt harshly. In parts of India repression contained protest, and after a few days the situation quietened. But in the middle Gangetic plain, a region comprising Bihar and the eastern United Provinces, the revolt intensified.²

The strength and fury of the revolt is epitomized in the following extract from an account by R. H. Niblett, an Anglo-Indian District Officer, of his tenacious defence of the Madhuban *thana* in the Misran area of Azamgarh district in the eastern United Provinces.

13. We reached Madhuban about noon. The police station stands on a plain, with a few trees and three or four houses only to east and north-east of it. A market is usually held here on Saturday afternoon, but not a soul was in sight. As we approached, the gaunt and lonely appearance of the *thana*, and the sentries on the roofs reminded me of tales of the Foreign Legion. The Station Officer and his staff had spent a sleepless night; but we found them ready and alert.

14. I then learnt of the incident at Rampur; and shortly after, of the one at Fatehpur as well. Other news of an alarming character also came in. Huge bodies of men were massing at Dubari and Fatehpur, with the intention of marching on the *thana*. Circle Inspector . . . and I decided not to return to Mau; but to see things through at Madhuban.

15. The extensive perimeter of the police station is composed of the office and the residential quarters, the intervening spaces being defended by high walls to the north, south and east, and a lower one to the west where is the main gate. This perimeter was not designed for defence, and most of us had perforce to do without cover.

16. Of our armed constables, two were posted on roofs, two at the main gate, two at the office windows, while one stood on a ladder at the north gate near the wall. The rest stood in the yard ready to defend any doors which might be forced. The *chaukidars* were mostly posted along the walls, with orders to brain any one who might attempt to climb over.

² See M. V. Harcourt, 'The "Quit India" Movement, August 1942: A Case Study in Militant Indian Nationalism' (University of Western Australia, M.A. thesis, 1967).

17. The records, mail and cash from the local Post Office were removed to the *thana*.

18. The horses belonging to the two Sub-Inspectors were removed to Nevada, a village not two furlongs from the *thana*. They would be safer there than in the *thana* stables; and it was not considered wise to keep them within the *thana* enclosure, lest, when firing started, they broke loose and damaged the defenders.

19. Constable . . . had already sent his wife and two daughters to a temple in Nevada. There remained seven women and ten children (families and female servants of the *thana* staff). They were all collected in the Station Officer's quarters, at the north-east corner of the *thana*.

20. Our garrison consisted, besides myself, of Circle Inspectors . . . Sub-Inspectors . . . and . . . Head Constable . . . an Under Officer, 18 Constables, 42 chaukidars (six of whom disappeared when trouble began), the Station Officer's son and nephew, and six servants (one being my driver . . .)

21. Our equipment consisted of 10 police muskets, 2 private guns, the revolvers with the three police officers, and four spears. The chaukidars, of course, had their *lathis*. (I may mention that police muskets are effective for only 100 to 120 yards.)

22. We repeatedly warned our men of the gravity of the situation, of their duty and their dangers, and of the need for effective fire.

23. About 15.00 hours, a crowd of about 1,000 people appeared from the west (that is on the roads from Ghosi and Dohrighat). Many were armed with *lathis* and spears. As we learnt later, some also carried plough-shares, hammers, saws and spades. They stood near the ruins of a house about three furlongs from the *thana*. When they saw us prepared for them, they picked up brick-bats, which they placed in the folds of their *dhotis*. With this contingent came two elephants with people on each. All waited and watched for forces from the east.

24. Shortly after, two contingents approached from the east. One, which consisted of at least 3,000 men, came down the Dubari road. The other of about 1,000 came down the Bilauli road. The latter was the party which had operated at Rampur and Fatehpur with it were people from villages such as Maniar in the Ballia District, 24 miles away.

25. At the meeting of the two roads, the two contingents combined; and in the distance their *lathis* and spears looked like a *sarpat* jungle on the move.

26. These crowds also halted. Some of men in it shouted out that they did not wish to touch the police or the Collector; but would make mincemeat of the Superintendent of Police (presumably because he was an Englishman, while I belong to the country). M. . . the pound-keeper, did his best to dissuade the crowd from an attack on the *thana*; but to no purpose.

27. Three emissaries now approached us. One, who came from the west, said but little; and in fact spoke quite humbly. The other two came from the east. They were Mangal Deo Shastri and Ram Birch Chaube—the former a student of the Benares Hindu University. The Circle Inspector and the Station Officer interviewed them through the windows to the office.

28. They explained that they had come not to fight their Indian brethren; but *swaraj* had now been attained; and they only wished to plant the Congress flag on the *thana*. Combined with this, was the demand for all official papers.

29. The Circle Inspector and the Station Officer left them in no doubt as to our reply. They retired, murmuring that it would now be necessary to act as in Benares and Allahabad.

30. The crowd now proceeded to burn the papers left in the Post Office, and to loot the residences of the Post Master, the Postman and also the neighbouring house of a Vaid. These places were in close proximity to the police station; but we could not allow ourselves to be diverted from our immediate defence.

31. The crowd now spread out, and attacked us from the north, east and west. Our sentries on the roofs shouted out that it was the order of the District Magistrate that no one should approach, and that any one defying the order would do so at his peril. This was merely a formal warning; for we never expected the crowd to heed it. '*Inqalab Zindabad*' and other slogans were heard all round.

32. The fight began with thousands of brick-bats being showered into the *thana*. Some of these came from astonishing distances. Those from the north-west, especially appeared to be flung by people about 100 yards away. Obviously slings were being used. A brick-bat struck Circle Inspector . . . on his turban. At least six fell on me; but, probably because of the distance from which they were thrown, I suffered a slight bruise only on my left arm. One large brick-bat did come with force; but it glanced off my helmet.

33. The elephants also moved up, apparently to assist in scaling the walls; but they hid behind a *bandh* to south of the *thana*. For a time, we could see the men seated on them; but they laid down when they saw me direct a constable to fire on them.

34. Our garrison fired no less than 119 rounds (86 from muskets, 27 from revolvers, 6 from private guns). One of the muskets failed us during the engagement. I am glad to say that fire was well controlled and very effective. (Nine empties were not found.)

35. Constable . . . was posted on the roof of the Station Officer's quarters, whence he could command three directions. Unfortunately he had no cover, and received many brick-bats. While his attention was diverted to

one direction, some of the assailants scaled an angle in a 12-foot wall. They speared him and rendered him unconscious. They seized his gun; but took none of the ammunition. He fell on to a lower roof, where we found him after the engagement.

36. Constable . . . was posted on the roof of the Head Constable's quarters, at the south-east corner of the *thana*. He was assailed with brick-bats, but he held his post till, one catching him near his eye, temporarily blinded him, and he had to descend. Fortunately no strong attack was pressed in this quarter, for it was ill-defended.

37. Constable . . . sustained a nasty wound on his cheek. Constable . . . took over his musket, but soon he too was wounded. Constable . . . was struck so often on different parts of his body, that he was temporarily crippled.

38. . . . chaukidar of Kandhera had been placed on look-out duty on a roof to the south. It seems that, when firing started, he grew so frightened that he decided to get away. He leapt down a 15-foot wall; and, not being in uniform, he was mistaken for a rebel, and shot dead.

39. Ram Nachhatr Tewari, one of the most troublesome men in the Misran, led an attack round the north-east corner of the *thana*. The intention was to force the two doors to the east, which lay in recesses on either side of the office. They were not loopholed; but had been barricaded, and chaukidars stood by. The doors could not have resisted a strong assault; but fire from the two office windows kept the foe at bay.

40. It was here that a musket had failed; but Constable . . . did excellent work with the other. His first shot missed Ram Nachhatr Tewari, who shouted to his followers that Mahatma Gandhi had, by miracle, rendered all fire harmless. The next shot laid him low, and 8 or 10 men, who followed, shared the same fate. This checked the assault from this direction.

41. The strongest attack was delivered from the north. There were several windows along this wall. We could not defend them all; and, owing to several abutments, it was not possible from any one of them to command any length of wall.

42. One, which opened into the Station Officer's quarters (where the women and children were assembled), was held by the Station Officer's nephew, who carried a private gun, while the Station Officer's son stood by with a spear. But no attack was delivered here, probably because of fire from the roof by Constable . . .

43. The other windows were all closed, and we hoped for the best. Unknown to us (for we had also closed the doors to these rooms) the crowd rushed up to some of them. They broke them open; but could not destroy the iron bars. They did, however, succeed in fishing out a great-coat and other property belonging to some constables.

44. In this part of the wall was also a backdoor to the quarters of the

Second Officer. This was completely shattered; though we did not know of it till after the engagement. The mob, however, had made no attempt to enter; possibly they suspected a trap, and the attack might by this time, have spent its force.

45. What I feared most was the door near the well next to the north wall. There was no loophole through it; so a constable was posted on a ladder to fire over the wall. Unfortunately he proved quite feeble. It was with difficulty I could make him fire; and, when he did, it was so gingerly that the mob rushed right up. When so close they could not be covered from any window; and the constable on the ladder could no longer hold his post, because of long spears and brick-bats.

46. The door was subjected to a severe battering. Fortunately, the leaves were largely composed of iron; and it never gave. The alarming feature was that it was held only by a flimsy upper latch; but *chaukidars* kept that in position. When the brick-bats came over fast and furious, the Station Officer occasionally pulled apart the door-leaves, and fired through them with his revolver.

47. The Circle Inspector, the Second Officer and some of our reserve constables now opened some of northern windows; and it was their fire which finally repelled the enemy.

48. Six constables and two *chaukidars* were wounded with brick-bats. But the only injury, which could be described as serious, was that on Constable . . . who was also speared. In the absence of medical aid, we could treat our injured with nothing but iodine.

49. We were naturally unable to tell the exact number of casualties among the enemy. But, from observation and from reports which came in, we estimated at least thirty killed and fifty wounded, half the latter severely. (At least four died later in hospital; and at the trial the number of dead was put at 40 or 50.)

50. Most of the bodies were removed by the rioters, though how they were disposed of, is still an unsolved mystery. It is surmised that they were thrown into a tank. Next morning, two dead bodies were found lying outside the *thana*. One was that of Ram Nachhatr Tewari.

51. The battle lasted full two hours. Then the mob stood off, though vowing vengeance in the future.³

The defenders of the Madhuban *thana* prevailed, but their colleagues elsewhere were overwhelmed. By the capture of police stations and other government posts and by extensive sabotage of communications the rebels destroyed the hold of the British over much of Bihar and

³ R. H. Niblett, *The Congress Rebellion in Azamgarh, August-September 1942, as recorded in the Diary of R. H. Niblett*, edited by S. A. A. Rizvi (Allahabad, 1957), pp. 11-17.

parts of the eastern United Provinces. For several days the effective British presence in these areas consisted of nervous bands of civil servants, policemen and non-officials gathered for mutual protection at strongpoints dotted across a hostile countryside. Only the large-scale deployment of troops permitted the crushing of the uprising and the re-establishment of British rule.

In the history of colonial India the striking parallel to the 1942 uprising is the Revolt of 1857. The Viceroy informed the British Government that, 'I am engaged here in meeting by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security.'⁴ Indeed, the challenge to imperial rule was even more serious than in 1857, in that the rebels of 1942 fought under the unifying banner of nationalism, and certainly would have achieved more enduring success had it not been for the concentration in eastern India of masses of troops assembled to meet the threat of Japanese invasion. Yet, despite its drama and intensity, the 1942 revolt has received inadequate scholarly treatment. The explanation is not far to seek: for historians operating within the discourse of elite historiography the substance of the 1942 revolt is difficult to swallow and impossible to digest.

Thus conservative historians who wish to frame explanations solely in terms of factions, political subcontractors, and elite reactions to imperial initiatives are not equipped to understand a major peasant revolt which developed in the absence of the senior Congress leadership.⁵ Nationalist historians have been placed more fortunately: as M. V. Harcourt has demonstrated they have been able to create a 'Myth of the 1942 rebellion' which supplies a glorious epic of heroic struggle unhampered by consideration of the complexities of the revolt.⁶ Nevertheless their deference to the Gandhian cult of non-violence distorts their treatment of the rebels' characteristic use of physical force, while their concern to engage in the historiography of 'freedom fighters' and their fundamental assumption of the essential

⁴ Linlithgow to Churchill, telegram: 31 Aug. 1942 in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power*, vol. II: 'Quit India' (London, 1971), pp. 835-54.

⁵ See Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India' in R. Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, vol. I (Delhi, 1982).

⁶ Harcourt, 'The "Quit India" Movement', Ch. 7.

unity and cohesiveness of the nascent Indian 'nation' blinds them to the complex nature of support for the revolt.

Harcourt has exposed the limitations of the nationalist treatment of the 1942 rebellion, but unfortunately his exploration of the inner nature of the revolt develops into an unsuccessful attempt to prove Eric Wolf's thesis that the 'middle peasants' characteristically provide the driving force of peasant insurrection.⁷ Accordingly Harcourt is unable to break the bonds of elite historiography: his vision is as monistic as that of conservative and nationalist historians, the difference being merely that he offers a model of middle peasant mobilization in place of their model of elite-initiated revolt.

This essay seeks to provide a more adequate account of the context and development of the 1942 revolt in its storm-centre of Bihar and the eastern United Provinces.⁸ It argues that both the strength and nature of the revolt and its eventual defeat may only be understood through a consideration of *the revolt's 'dual' quality, whereby it comprised not one but two interacting insurgencies. One insurgency was an elite nationalist uprising of the high caste rich peasants and small landlords who dominated the Congress. The other insurgency was a subaltern rebellion in which the initiative belonged to the poor, low caste people of the region.*

II

In the months preceding the 1942 revolt economic and political pressures created extensive dissatisfaction and uncertainty. The economic depression of the 1930s, which had incorporated a massive slump in the prices for agricultural produce, ended with the world economic upturn associated with the beginning of the Second World War. By March 1941 the average price of coarse rice in Bihar had increased by 13.2 per cent over the average price in 1940 and by 32.5 per cent over the average price in 1939.⁹ Primary produce and other prices rose steadily higher throughout the wartime period and food and commodities became scarce.

⁷ Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj. Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 281, 284.

⁸ An earlier, less detailed version of this article is presented as Chapter 7 of my *Peasant Movements in Colonial India: North Bihar, 1917-1942* (Australian National University South Asia Monograph Series; forthcoming).

⁹ GB FR(1) April 1941, HP f 18/4/1941 NAI. For details of economic conditions, see the official Fortnightly Reports, the *Land Revenue Administration Reports* and the *Season and Crop Reports*.

To lessen discontent the government attempted to control price levels and to ensure the adequate supply of essential commodities. A. W. Flack, ex-I.C.S., reminisced that 'the merchants had been in the grain business for generations and the struggle was an uneven one', and remarked that, when sampling rice, 'I would feel the grains with a shrewd expression and try and keep the price down'. H. B. Martin, also ex-I.C.S., recalled that despite corruption, inefficiency and a complete lack of reliable statistics the system of rationing and price control nevertheless worked in a rough and ready way. He noted that 'speculation, hoarding, black market, justified complaints by members of the public and rice weevils abounded, but there were no widespread deaths due to lack of food'.¹⁰ But although government intervention may have helped save Bihar from a catastrophe comparable to the Bengal famine of 1943, many people were obliged to endure great suffering.

Of course the burden of hard times was not borne equally: on the contrary, for the small landlords and rich peasants who comprised the elite in the villages, high prices and scarcity provided many opportunities to profit through grain dealing and black marketeering. The fortunes of the middle peasants were less clear-cut. All middle peasants suffered from shortages of cotton, kerosene and other important consumer items, but many found it easier to pay rent and to profit from the sale of their crops. The prices for good quality rice and other crops produced for the market generally rose higher than did the prices for the inferior grains on which the middle peasant mainly relied for the subsistence of himself and his family. Thus a middle peasant might manage successfully even when his harvests were below average. The circumstances in which a middle peasant found himself depended on his good or bad luck, the skill of his cultivation, his rent and debt obligations, the impact—which varied throughout the region—of flood, drought and crop disease, and on the particular conditions prevailing when he brought his crops to market.

For poor peasants and labourers, however, scarcity and high prices were clearly onerous. As prices rose the real value of cash wages diminished, while scarcity meant that those who received wages in kind found themselves under pressure to accept less. Given the

¹⁰ Memoirs of A. W. Flack and H. B. Martin, District Officers' Collection, Mss Eur F 180/17, p. 24, and Mss Eur F 180/21, pp. 43-8, IOL.

abundance of labour and the extent of their indebtedness, the poor found themselves in an adverse bargaining position. Nonetheless, some of those whose labour was not tied to a landlord or rich peasant benefited from the increased availability of employment in the construction of aerodromes and in other projects associated with the war effort.

The pressure of privation received characteristic expression in a dramatic rise in the crime rate. Generally, and especially at times of high prices and scarcity, a substantial proportion of the prisoners in jails were serving only short sentences. As one official commented, 'A very large proportion of these short term convicts are men and women, driven, more or less directly, by want of food to the commission of petty theft.'¹¹ In December 1940 an official report commented that crime figures had been rising steadily 'since 1939, if not before', and now indicated 'a disquieting position'. In addition to petty pilfering the rate of gang-robbery increased. In Bihar in April 1941 ninety-two dacoities were recorded, an increase of 100 per cent on the monthly figure for the previous three years. By June the following year dacoities had reached a record level.¹²

Market looting, a phenomenon especially associated with scarcity, also occurred. In 1918 and 1921, when similar conditions prevailed, there had been several looting incidents. In 1921, in the midst of the excitement created by the Non-cooperation Movement, rioters at several markets had demanded in the name of Gandhi and Swaraj that prices be reduced.¹³ In January 1942 several market-lootings occurred in Purnea district, with the looters reportedly claiming that prices had become so high that they were obliged to take to looting to get clothes. The following June a crowd of five hundred looted three cloth shops at Raxaul town, Champaran, and subsequently looting occurred at six other places in the district. The administration alleged that left-wing activists were behind the looting, but also accepted that the unrest partly resulted from antagonism to local mill-owners who, to avoid prosecution under the anti-hoarding regulations, had shifted large quantities of grain into storage over the border in Nepal.¹⁴ In

¹¹ G. E. Owen, *Bihar and Orissa in 1921* (Patna, 1922), p. 109.

¹² GB FR(1) Dec. 1940, GB FR(1) May 1941, GB FR(2) Jan. 1942, GB FR(2) July 1942.

¹³ GB FR(2) May 1918; PS f 21, 1921. For discussion, see *Peasant Movements*, pp. 98-9.

¹⁴ GB FR(2) Jan. 1942, GB FR(2) June 1942, GB FR(1) July 1942.

Champan in early July two 'dacoities . . . were committed by a mob of 400 persons in broad daylight'.¹⁵ The large numbers involved suggest that these incidents were not ordinary gang-robberies, but instead were acts of popular protest against harsh conditions and profiteering.

In addition to economic pressures, the months before the 1942 revolt were characterized by increasing political tension. The Congress leaders did not wish to initiate mass civil disobedience against the British in times of war, but also did not intend to co-operate with them unless Indians gained a substantial share of power. But the British, engrossed in the war and unwilling to surrender control over India's resources, were reluctant to make substantial concessions. To meet this challenge and to placate those Congressmen who demanded that some initiative be taken Gandhi launched an 'individual Satyagraha' campaign. The campaign ran from October 1940 to December 1941 and was intended to embarrass the British without hindering the war effort. During its course individual satyagrahis came forward and publicly breached the government's wartime regulations restricting the right of free speech.

In Bihar the campaign floundered because many of the Congressmen designated as satyagrahis did not wish to relinquish the influential positions they had gained on municipal and district boards, particularly when factional rivals were always ready to move into their places. Consequently they refused or were extremely slow to court arrest.¹⁶ Nor, because of the individual, small-scale quality of the law-breaking involved, did the campaign attract extensive interest and support, though because of this it did succeed, unlike previous campaigns, in adhering strictly to the principle of non-violence. Overall, nevertheless, individual satyagraha kept interest in the nationalist movement alive and helped prepare the ground for the initiation of mass civil disobedience.¹⁷

The initiation of mass civil disobedience became more probable with the worsening of the war situation and the repeated failure of the

¹⁵ GB FR(1) July 1942.

¹⁶ Extract from provincial report, 19 Mar. 1941, HP f 3/19/1941, NAI; GB FR(2) Dec. 1940; GB FR(1) Jan. 1941; GB FR(2) Mar. 1941; GB FR(1) Apr. 1941; Members of the Congress Party in Shahabad District Board to Rajendra Prasad, 7 Aug. 1941, AICCP f P6, 1940, NML.

¹⁷ History of the Civil Disobedience Movement, 1940-1, HP f 3/6/1942, NAI.

Government of India and the Congress to reach a compromise. In December 1941 Japan entered the war, and within three months devastated Britain's position in Asia. By March 1942 the invasion of India seemed imminent. Many Congressmen concluded that now would be an opportune time to launch mass civil disobedience, and they listened sympathetically to Gandhi's suggestion that the best way of averting a Japanese invasion would be to force Japan's enemy, Britain, to relinquish control over India.

Winston Churchill's government attempted to win Indian support by sending Sir Stafford Cripps to India with a new constitutional proposal. But the Congress spurned the offer, nominally because it failed to give Indians an acceptable level of executive power and because it made unacceptable concessions to the Muslim League. However, perhaps the underlying reason for the rejection of the Cripps offer was the widespread feeling that it merely represented 'a post-dated cheque on a crashing bank'.

In Bihar and the eastern United Provinces anxiety intensified because of the proximity of the war zone. As the Shahabad District Officer observed in December 1941:

The situation in the Far East has been causing considerable anxiety and the news that Rangoon has been bombed caused widespread panic. An appreciable number of people from this district have their relations in Burma and many men from Shahabad are serving as constables in Burma and other places in the Far East Leading merchants in the towns of this district, who have got offices in Calcutta, have already begun their preparation to leave their Calcutta offices and have been withdrawing relations from Calcutta. There is a widespread fear that Calcutta, Jamshedpur and other steel and coal producing places will shortly be bombed.¹⁸

With the Japanese invasion of Burma in March 1942, resident Indians returned to their native villages in Bihar and the United Provinces, impoverished and strongly critical of British mismanagement. From Calcutta, which now seemed a near-certain target for serious Japanese attack, large numbers of casual workers returned to their homes in the central Gangetic plain, placing additional economic pressure on their families, swelling the petty crime rate and helping to encourage rumours of an imminent British collapse.¹⁹

¹⁸ Quoted in K. K. Datta, *History of the Freedom Movement in Bihar*, vol. 3, (Patna, 1957), pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ GB FR(1) and (2) Feb. 1942.

In May the Bihar Government remarked as follows with the characteristic understatement of the colonial ruling class:

The unfavourable impression caused by the passage of trains through North Bihar containing sick and wounded from the Burma front is now likely to be strengthened by the unexpected return of labour which had only recently been recruited for the military roads in Assam. These labourers are returning in many cases with sores on their feet in a condition which shows that they have not been well cared for in the journey. And on their return the tale is spreading that many of them are victims of the Japanese air raids in Assam . . . According to the District Magistrate of Gaya the general conclusion arrived at by the people is that the Japanese have succeeded in cutting off China from India and that the Burma road which was originally intended to be the lifeline of China has now become the line of Japanese invasion.²⁰

People with liquid assets demonstrated their uncertainty about the future by buying buildings and land as a precaution against the collapse of the currency. In the first three weeks of February, savings banks withdrawals 'were nearly double those in the corresponding periods in the preceding years'. Early in July the Bihar Government reported as follows:

The defeatism prevailing in political and particularly in Congress circles in its turn produces its repercussions on the uneducated classes. The impending collapse of Government is freely talked about even by villagers. Discontent in the districts continues owing to scarcity and high prices of essential commodities . . . [Government propaganda] . . . does not seem to be very effective.²¹

As is especially characteristic of largely non-literate populations, with their traditional consciousness and their dependence on oral communication, rumour played a central part in shaping opinion. In April the Bihar Chief Secretary referred to reports that cultivators, 'believing that Government intended to commandeer all standing wheat crops', had harvested their crops early. From Shahabad it was reported that many people had come to believe that the Japanese were Hindus and that therefore they had nothing to fear from a Japanese invasion. And in Muzaffarpur district in July a blind sadhu was said to have predicted the end of the British Raj in three months and thirteen days.²²

²⁰ GB FR(2) May 1942, Quoted in Francis G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution: The Quit India Movement* (Delhi, 1971), p. 234.

²¹ GB FR(2) Feb. 1942, GB FR(1) July 1942.

²² GB FR(1) and (2) Apr. 1942, GB FR(2) July 1942 cited in Hutchins, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-4, 254.

The anxiety of the British administration was increased by its doubts about the ability of the police and the administration to fulfill their responsibilities. Indian officers in both the lower ranks of the civil service and in the police force were unwilling to engage fully and vigorously in their work. They had served under Congress ministries in 1937-9, knew that eventually Congress governments would return to power, and did not wish, for fear of future repercussions, to identify themselves too strongly as loyal servants of British rule. In the police force this lack of morale prevailed among sub-inspectors and their superiors, but had not yet extended to the rank and file.²³

In addition to poor officer morale, the police were greatly hampered by their sparse numbers. For example the evidence presented to the Indian Statutory Commission in 1929 showed that Bihar and Orissa spent the least on police per head of population and had the lowest proportion of police to population in any of the provinces of British India.²⁴ In the 1930s increases in the numbers of the police had kept pace neither with the rise in the size of the population nor with the increase in the number of serious crimes. In 1930 the ratio of police to population had been 1 : 2,364, and there were 44,449 cognizable crimes reported. In 1939 the ratio had declined to 1 : 2,625, but the number of cognizable crimes had risen to 53,903.²⁵

The inadequate number of police contributed to the rise in the crime rate and particularly to the increase in the number of dacoities. In 1940, to assist the police in coping with dacoity, the Bihar Government formed a Village Defence Organization, a voluntary association made up of villagers willing to organize and train themselves, on a part-time basis, to defend their property. But unfortunately for administrative prestige the speakers who went on tour calling on people to join the organization helped create 'the impression that the Police are not strong enough to tackle the dacoits'.²⁶ Moreover, many villagers were unwilling to join because of rumours that eventually the volunteers would be sent to the front and 'because they have

²³ D.I.B.'s report of the political situation in Bihar, 15 Jan. 1941, HP f 31/1/1941, NAI. See also Stewart to Linlithgow, 27 Feb. and 25 May 1942, Mss Eur F 125/49, IOL, and see Stewart to Linlithgow, telegram, 29 July 1942, document 360 in Mansergh, *op. cit.*

²⁴ Secretary of State for India, *Indian Statutory Commission*, vol. XII (London, 1930), p. 389.

²⁵ Appendix II to D.I.B.'s report cited in footnote 23 above. See also D. Pilditch, Memorandum on the Bihar Police, Mss Eur F 125/49, IOL.

²⁶ GB FR(1) July 1942.

*nothing to lose and there is no need for them to patrol the villages for the protection of the merchants and zamindars who profiteer or who live upon the cultivator. The majority of the members of the Village Defence Parties come from the smaller zamindars, the literate middle class and persons in some sort of service.*²⁷

The administration was also too weak to fulfill its responsibilities adequately. Both provinces, and especially Bihar, spent only small amounts relative to those in the other provinces of British India on the maintenance of the administration and the provision of services,²⁸ and from 1939 the demands of the war siphoned off good officials to the provincial and all-India capitals, leaving many of the districts in the charge of men who were either past their prime or else were young and inexperienced. By the early 1940s the administrations of Bihar and the United Provinces experienced serious strain in meeting routine responsibilities. They had nothing in reserve with which to meet a major crisis.

III

In the middle Gangetic plain the response to the savage British blow against the leadership and organization of the Congress was swift and angry. In Bihar, for example, demonstrations and processions in the towns culminated on 11 August in a strongly supported march on the Patna Secretariat building. The police opened fire, killing seven people, all of them students, and wounding several others. The Governor, Sir Thomas Stewart, reported thus on what followed:

Though the firing checked the attack the crowd went back in an ugly mood in the evening and through the night engaged in widespread sabotage and road obstruction, the thoroughness of which had to be seen to be believed. Telegraph poles complete with their full equipment of wires were pulled over and branches of trees a foot and over in diameter were chopped down. This was not the work of five minutes or an hour but nevertheless no information came into headquarters that this wholesale destruction was going on. The ordinary police in the city as well as the civic sense of the citizen appears to have been paralysed by fright.²⁹

The arrival of troops from Dinapur and Ranchi allowed the government to regain control of Patna but meanwhile unrest had

²⁷ GB FR(2) May 1942, GB FR(2) July 1942 cited in Hutchins, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

²⁸ Secretary of State for India, *op. cit.*, vol. XII, p. 377.

²⁹ Stewart to Linlithgow, 22 Aug. 1942, document 612 in Mansergh, *op. cit.*

developed in the countryside. Students played a major part in raising the revolt. K. K. Datta records that 'from the 10th August groups of students and other workers seized some railway trains and moved in them from place to place to disseminate the gospel of the Revolution'. R. N. Lines, the Darbhanga District Officer, reported that 'all over the district, swarms of rioters and students took possession of the railways, and indulged in ticketless travel en masse, until the railways ceased to work'. Similarly in the United Provinces 'rumours were afloat that students from Benares Hindu University had alighted in twos and threes at every station along the line to organize attacks on the railway'.³⁰ Clearly there is no validity to the claim of Francis G. Hutchins that the 1942 revolt occurred spontaneously without the lead being given by 'urban and intellectual elements'.³¹

However the contribution of students to the spreading of the call to insurrection should not be exaggerated. In Bihar and the eastern United Provinces even the largest towns lacked a distinct urban identity, and most of their inhabitants had strong and continually renewed links with the countryside. Even without the activity of the students, the usual to-and-froing between town and country certainly would have spread the news far and wide.

Whatever the precise means of transmission, the call to arms received an enthusiastic response. The Darbhanga District Officer reported as follows:

. . . there were no disturbances on the 9th of August. But on the 10th of August demonstrations by students of all schools and colleges took place all over the district. These demonstrations continued at Laheriasarai each day until the 13th of August on which date 31 rioters and 28 Police men were injured in a clash, there were sporadic demonstrations on 14th, 15th and 16th August, but by that time the student leaders were scattered over the district creating havoc elsewhere. Support was given to the students by some members of the bar, the students, with whom beglignce [*sic*] became mixed up from the 12th, made the Bar Library and the Criminal Courts the principal centre of their activities. On the 17th a big mob was organised to capture the bungalow of the Superintendent of Police where

³⁰ Datta, *op. cit.*, p. 45; R. N. Lines to Chief Secretary, 22 Dec. 1942, FMP f 84, 1920-42, BSA (hereafter Darbhanga Report); Niblett, *op. cit.*, p. 7. See also Govind Sahai, '42 *Rebellion: An Authentic Review of the Great Upheaval of 1942* (Delhi, 1947), p. 244.

³¹ Francis G. Hutchins, *India's Revolution. Gandhi and the Quit India Movement* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973), p. 227.

I was staying, and the Treasury. It was dispersed by fire and the town was relatively quiet from that date. At Samastipur these demonstrations continued until the 15th of August as troops passing through opened fire, killing 15 and injuring 15 persons [sic]. By the 14th it was evident that the movement had passed from the stage of students' demonstration to open rebellion. At Madhubani the students processions continued until the 15th, when the Police opened fire, killing 2 persons. Here also, as at Laheriasarai and Samastipur, 1 wyers were mixed up in the demonstrations, and agitators from outside also whipped up the excitement of the students. . . . Two or three days of these intensive demonstrations sufficed to work the people up to a state of frenzy in which they were prepared for any excess. On 12th August railway trains all over the district began to be damaged, on the 13th the railway time table was completely disorganised and by the 14th it had completely ceased to function. All principal roads were also rendered impassable between the 13th and 20th of August by the destruction of vital bridges, the cutting of embankments, etc. The telegraph system ceased to function from the 13th of August . . . The Registration Officer at Benipatti was burnt on the 22nd of August, on the 15th of August Kamtaul Registration Office was captured, but the local Babhan zamindars prevented their follower's from destroying the contents. On the 15th of August the valuable stock of flax at Pusa was burnt. Excise sheds at Sahar, Harlakhi and Paukahi were raided and papers destroyed but no serious damage done. During this period 40 post offices were forcibly closed and many of them looted. All railway stations except those at Darbhanga and Samastipur were damaged in some way or other, and the damage to railway stations alone in this district had been estimated by the District Traffic Superintendent of Samastipur at 5 lacs of rupees . . . the Addl. District Magistrate was murderously attacked with a bayonet at Sakri on the 19th.³²

In Darbhanga the rebels also attacked twenty of the district's police stations, capturing thirteen of them. They achieved similar victories elsewhere. At Rupauli in Purnea, in an echo of the Chauri Chaura killing of 1922, the crowd besieging a *thana* set it on fire, burning its defenders alive. In north Bhagalpur, all the *thanas* 'had been closed, locked and sealed by the Congress workers as early as the 13th August'. By 24 August in north Monghyr, all rural police stations had either been overrun or abandoned. By 19 August in Sitamarhi subdivision of Muzaffarpur, all the *thanas* except the one at the subdivisional headquarters had been overwhelmed. Seventeen of the district's twenty-three police stations came under attack and fourteen of them were taken. In Saran the authorities abandoned nine police

³² Darbhanga Report.

stations.³³ Throughout Bihar and the eastern United Provinces many of the *chaukidars* (village watchmen) stopped functioning, either because of intimidation or because they identified with the movement. With the disruption of communications and the collapse of the police system the British lost control of much of the countryside. They retained control of the region's towns in which they concentrated their forces, but elsewhere, according to one official, 'Perfect chaos and anarchy were reported to be reigning'.³⁴

The tactics with which the insurgents achieved their initial successes were a development of those employed in previous nationalist campaigns. At first they engaged in slogan shouting processions behind the Congress banner. At this stage some sabotage of government property occurred, but extensive sabotage did not begin until the police had repressed demonstrations by means of lathi charges, gunfire and mass arrests. In the initiation of extensive sabotage and of attacks on police stations throughout the countryside some part was played by the Congress left-wingers who had led peasant protest during the 1930s. In 1938 and 1939 Congress Socialists had publicly emphasized the need, in any future mass nationalist campaign, to sabotage road and rail communications.³⁵ The Left was influential among students who at first spearheaded the campaign, and during its course left-wingers distributed pamphlets calling on the people to sabotage communications and attack government property.

But the importance of left-wing influence should not be over-emphasized. The Left was influential in only a few of the districts of the region. Both mainstream and left-wing Congressmen produced pamphlets calling for sabotage, and in both cases the pamphlets only seem to have appeared when sabotage was already under way.³⁶ Because

³³ Government of Bihar (Secret) Report on the Civil Disturbances in Bihar, 1942, issued Patna, 1944, IOL (hereafter Civil Disturbances), pp. 13, 14 and Appendix C, pp. 32-6; GOI, 'Verbatim record of the proceedings at the Conference of Provincial Representatives convened in connection with the Congress disturbances, 1942-43', HP f 3/89/1942, NAI (hereafter Provincial Conference Proceedings), p. 56; B. Sivaram, Purnea District Officer, to Chief Secretary, 27 Aug. 1942, para. 9, FMP f 93, 1942-4, BSA; Monghyr District Magistrate, Situation in the Beguserai Subdivision, FMP f 47, 1942, BSA.

³⁴ Monghyr District Magistrate, Situation in the Beguserai Subdivision, *ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁵ GB FR(2) Feb. 1939.

³⁶ Datta, *op. cit.*, p. 45. For pamphlets urging the employment of sabotage, see the appendices to *ibid.* See also Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement, The Second World War and Indian Nationalism* (Delhi, 1975), pp. 88-9.

the communications system was already in considerable disarray, these pamphlets did not have a wide circulation. The leading Left activist in the 1930s, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, had gravitated towards the Communist Party of India. He supported Britain and the U.S.S.R. in what he regarded as the 'People's War' against international fascism, and hence he and his followers did not support the revolt.³⁷ Jaya Prakash Narayan had already spent most of the time since March 1940 in jail, and in the early days of the revolt Ramnandan Misra was in Bombay and Madras, and was subsequently arrested in Cuttack, Orissa, in late August. The other leading pro-revolt left-wingers were clapped into jail during the initial government clamp-down. At the height of the movement only those less influential left-wingers whom the British had regarded as too unimportant to arrest were still at large to engage in protest and propaganda.³⁸

Ironically the authorities may themselves have been partly responsible for the tactics adopted by Congress supporters. To justify its draconic response to the passing of the Quit India resolution the government contended that the Congress had planned wholesale sabotage and disruption. The wide publicity given this claim apparently encouraged nationalist sympathizers to act to bring it to fruition.³⁹

But overall, neither the role of the Left nor that of the authorities decisively determined the measures adopted by the supporters of the Quit India movement. Sabotage was an established weapon in the armoury of the Congress, and had been used extensively against toddy tappers and liquor merchants during the 1930-4 campaign. In the 1920s and 1930s there had been incidents in which Congress supporters sabotaged communications. Nor was strong antagonism

³⁷ Walter Hauser, 'The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1929-1942. A Study of an Indian Peasant Movement' (University of Chicago Ph.D. thesis), pp. 148-51; Stewart to Linlithgow, 24 March 1942, Mss Eur F 125/49, IOL; Surindra Gopal, 'Peasant Movement in Bihar During the Second World War', in A. N. Sinha Institute, *Behavioural Scientist: Essays in Honour of Professor Sachchidananda* (Patna, 1978).

³⁸ Ajit Bhattacharjea, *Jay Prakash. A Political Biography* (Delhi, 1975), pp. 77-80; Datta, op. cit., Appendix H; P. N. Chopra (ed.), *Quit India Movement. British Secret Report* (Faridabad, 1976, a reprint of Wickenden's Report on the Disturbances of 1942-3, with appendices), pp. 262, 273-4; S. P. Sen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. IV (Calcutta, 1974), p. 113.

³⁹ Bhuyan, op. cit., pp. 53, 90; Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography* (Bombay, 1957), pp. 535-6, 538, 549-50; Sahai, op. cit., pp. 138, 220, 230.

to the police a new phenomenon. During previous mass campaigns there had been attacks both on policemen and on *thanas*. On a number of occasions and during the Non-cooperation Movement groups of demonstrators overran and occupied *thanas* and at Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur in 1922 they had burnt down the *thana* with its occupants inside. And several times during the Civil Disobedience Movement crowds of demonstrators attempted to raise the Congress flag over *thanas* but were repulsed with gunfire.⁴⁰

The difference in 1942 was not that such events occurred, but that they occurred with a greater intensity and were concentrated within a shorter period of time than previously. The absence of the restraining influence of the senior Congress leaders because of their imprisonment allied with the angry reaction to their summary arrest did much to cause this frequency and intensity of protest. The depth and extent of hostility to the authorities, and particularly to the police, meant that government property and personnel provided a natural target. And when, throughout the countryside, the administration buckled under the strain, many people who were not regular Congress supporters felt further encouraged to participate in sabotage and disruption.

The early triumphs of the insurgents were achieved in the absence of overall co-ordination. The arrest of the senior Congress leadership and of most of the leading local nationalist activists resulted in a situation broadly similar to that which prevailed at the high points of official repression during the civil disobedience campaigns of 1930-4. At the local level, less important activists and sympathizers took the lead. The leaders of the attack on the Madhuban *thana* in Azamgarh included Ram Nachhtar Tewari, Ram Birch Chaube, and Mangal Deo Shastri, a Banares Hindu University student.⁴¹ In Saran, Jubba Mallah led the assault on the Minapur *thana*. A fisherman by caste, Jubba had engaged in his traditional occupation until about 1941, when he had become 'a congress volunteer, and . . . [had] moved about in the locality . . . preaching the creed of the Congress party'.⁴²

⁴⁰ Champaran Police Superintendent, Situation in Champaran up to 9 Nov. 1921, PS f 539, 1921 BSA; United Provinces Government Press Communique, 6 Feb. 1922, HP f 563, 1922, NAI; GB FR(2) Dec. 1920; Memorandum from Saran Police Superintendent to Inspector General Police, 6 Aug. 1930, BSA; HP f 5/80/1932, NAI.

⁴¹ Niblett, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 15.

⁴² Judgement in High Court, Patna, on case of Jubba Mallah vs. King-Emperor, HP f 3/31/1944. NAI.

At Hajipur in Muzaffarpur Akshaya Kumar resigned from his high school post and assumed the leadership of the local students. In Purnea Jagannath Kundu, the son of Dr Kishori Lal Kundu, a prominent local Congressman, was among the leaders of an attack on the Katihar *thana*. At Madhipura in Bhagalpur, Birendra Prasad Singh, Bhupendra Narayan Mandal and Deota Prasad Singh were among the leading figures.⁴³ In the village of Garkha in Saran the lead was taken by Jaglal Choudhury, assisted by two local men, Kumar Pashupati Singh and B. Firangi Singh. Choudhury, a Pasi by caste, had served as a minister in the Congress provincial government of 1937-9, but had been regarded as rather a nonentity who had been merely a token addition to the otherwise high-caste Congress ministry.⁴⁴

At the names and the biographical fragments given above indicate, the local leaders mainly came from high-caste backgrounds but also included lower caste men. Similarly their followers came from a broad spectrum of society. The social breadth of the insurrection gave it the appearance of a cohesive upheaval, and many historians have accepted this appearance as the reality. However a closer reading of the evidence reveals the essential duality of the revolt. In Bihar and the eastern United Provinces there erupted not one but two interacting insurgencies: an elite nationalist uprising and a subaltern rebellion.

The elite nationalist uprising began with the circulation of the news of the arrest of the Congress leaders and the initiation of heavy repression of the Congress party, and its intensification after the harsh official reaction to the first series of protests. Students took the lead, and in a poor and non-literate society those privileged to receive secondary and tertiary education came almost exclusively from elite backgrounds. The students gained strong support from their brethren and connections among the high-caste rich peasants and small landlords who in previous years had become the backbone of the Congress. After the Rupauli incident, for example, in which some policemen had been burnt to death while defending their *thana*, the manager of the Raj Darbhanga circle of Bhawanipur reported that

⁴³ Datta, *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 68, 161.

⁴⁴ Confidential notes on the Ministers enclosed with Mainwaring to Puckle, 31 Aug. 1938, Mss Eur F 125/45, IOL; Judgement in Special Cases 4 and 5, 1942, King-Emperor vs. B. Jaglal Choudhary and others, 4 Nov. 1942, and Justice C. M. Agarwala, *Criminal Review* 2, 1942, 8 Dec. 1942, HP f 3/80/1942, NAI.

'all the well to do people . . . were accused and are absconding'. He went on to explain, in a rather jaundiced vein, as follows:

In this circle number of well to do cultivators is greater one and they are leaders of their villagers They are invariably wearing Khadars [i.e. Khadi] and pose to be congressmen which they are actually not. Khadar is their garb of selfish motive and gives enough justification of their being selfish They are morally perverted and rule the villages.⁴⁵

The subaltern rebellion got under way when the tumult of the elite nationalist uprising stimulated the poor to join in attacks on government buildings and property. These rebels were much the same people who had engaged in market looting earlier in the year and who had recently swelled the figures for petty crime.

Probably those who joined the revolt partly in the hope of acquiring provisions began taking part last and withdrew first when repression began, and accordingly are under-represented in the casualty and imprisonment figures. And possibly their numbers are understated because of the operation of a process of 'sanskritization' whereby lower caste men attempted to increase their standing by, amongst other things, assuming characteristically higher caste names. It should also be observed that during and immediately after the revolt the 'crime rate' rose to unprecedented heights, and it is impossible to discover what proportion of 'crimes' were committed by 'professional criminals' and what proportion were the work of impoverished villagers driven by economic necessity. Indeed, these categories overlap extensively, since in Bihar even in relatively prosperous years dire poverty forces many to make crime their profession. Amidst the scarcity of 1942, many subaltern rebels no doubt became involved in 'crime' and thus are listed as criminals rather than insurgents in official records.

The duality of the Quit India revolt is epitomized in the following extract from a report by the Madhubani subdivisional officer:

Most of the Hindus who took part in the movement were from the higher castes There were agitators from other castes also. Generally people from lower castes or those belonging to the agricultural labourer class did not take part in the movement at first. They joined the movement in its later stage when they hoped that they would be able to make something out of it by looting . . .

⁴⁵ Bhawanipur AAR 1349 Fa (1941-2) f 16D2, C. Bhawanipur, 1942-3, RDA.

In Purnea, according to an official report, Congress workers used the prospect of loot as a means by which to encourage people to participate in the revolt. And from Beguserai in Monghyr, the Sub-divisional Officer wrote thus:

Congress had their organisation in every village more or less: the young men . . . specially the Bhumihars, had an inherent tendency to work as volunteers under Congress flag. These village organisations were in the best form at the time of Congress government. After the fall of Congress government there was marked decline but in many villages they maintained it; the village teachers played an important part in maintaining the organisation . . . the school students started the (Quit India) movement; they were joined by all sections of Congress workers. The sober section of Congress tried to keep the movement under control, but when they allowed the village mass to join, it became an economic question: the vast properties, specially foodgrains at the railway station attracted them. . . . Of the villagers the Bhumihars and the poor labourers took prominent part in the loot. The merchants class in outlying stations were at the mercy of the Congress. . . . But somehow, they managed to get the leaders on their sides and thereby saved their property from loot: at some places, they got hold of the leaders by making payment to the Congress cause: at some places they joined the movement to some extent. . . . [By 14 August] the situation was completely out of the hands of the students: the looters got complete upperhand: in order to keep the hold the younger section of the Congress began to support the action of the looters and even joined: the sober section did not approve it but they had no hold at the time.⁴⁶

The simple-minded economic determinism underlying these accounts is noteworthy. The officials who prepared them surmised that a straightforward connection existed between deprivation and revolt. A moment's reflection, however, leads to the conclusion that if deprivation was in itself sufficient to cause revolt, then the modern history of India would be characterized by uninterrupted turmoil, instead of consisting of long periods of relative quiet punctuated by outbursts of popular fury and by generally short-lived agitation over particular issues. In addition to economic deprivation, the irruption of subaltern groups into political action required a suitable occasion

⁴⁶ Madhubani Subdivisional Officer to Darbhanga District Magistrate, 16 Dec. 1942, FMP f 84, 1942, BSA; B. Sivaram, Purnea District Magistrate to Chief Secretary, 24 Aug. and 3 Sept. 1942, FMP files 93, 1942-4, and 84, 1942 BSA; Beguserai Subdivisional Officer, Report on Civil Disobedience Movement, 22 Dec. 1942, FMP f 45, 1942, BSA (hereafter Beguserai Report). For the full text of this document see *Appendix* below.

and the articulation of a moral justification, in terms of their consciousness, for acts of physical force. Thus market lootings seem generally to have grown out of small incidents in which a vendor was perceived to be treating his clients unfairly, and to have proceeded on the assumption that the looters had the moral right to oblige the vendors to lower their prices or give more value for money.⁴⁷ Here exists the notion of the 'just price', and the denial of the legitimacy of the mechanisms of the market. And in 1942, as the administrative machine of the Raj buckled under the strain of the nationalist uprising, the subaltern groups took the opportunity to make a moral protest against the 'Sarkar' because they regarded it as ultimately responsible for the conditions of economic deprivation within which they found themselves. In this light the selectivity of their actions is striking; as will be shown in more detail below, despite their grinding poverty the subaltern rebels attacked exclusively government property rather than private property in general.

The element binding the two insurgencies together was the ideology of nationalism, and an awareness of the duality of the revolt permits us to appreciate more fully the inner diversity and complexity of nationalist consciousness.⁴⁸ Consider the use of the radical slogan 'Inqilab Zindabad' in the midst of the nominally Congress-controlled assault on the Madhuban *thana*. And what of Ram Nachhtar's claim during the assault that Gandhi had rendered the rebels invulnerable to gunfire?⁴⁹ Whether a cynical attempt to manipulate popular religious feelings, or (more likely) an identification with the subaltern world vision in the heat of battle, this claim to invulnerability illustrates the permeation of popular nationalism with a characteristically subaltern religious consciousness.

M. V. Harcourt shows an awareness of the complexity of the revolt but does not perceive its dual quality. Instead he argues that the 'smallholder peasant' played a central role both in the peasant agitations of the late 1930s and in the revolt of 1942.⁵⁰ He describes

⁴⁷ GB PS f 21, 1921.

⁴⁸ See G. Pandey, 'Mobilization in a Mass Movement: Congress "Propaganda" in the United Provinces (India), 1930-34', *Modern Asian Studies*, 9:2 (1975), pp. 205-26.

⁴⁹ See paragraphs 31 and 40 in the long quotation given above from Niblett, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ M. V. Harcourt, 'Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India: The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East United Provinces', in D. A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1919-1947* (London, New Delhi, 1977).

the 'smallholder peasant' as occupying the middle range of the social hierarchy and as producing both for subsistence and for the market. Harcourt's interpretation does not convince. His analysis of peasant turbulence in the late 1930s correctly identifies the galvanizing effects of the depression in primary produce prices and provides a sensitive assessment of the leadership role assumed by the Congress Socialists. But Harcourt does not appreciate the pivotal part played in the *kisan sabha* movement by better established tenants and exaggerates the intensity and extent of peasant protest.

In discussing the months leading up to the 1942 revolt Harcourt sets out, but fails, to discover economic pressures as the driving force behind smallholder participation in politics. In the early 1940s many 'smallholder' peasants were doing reasonably well. For example, in the Padri area they benefited from the cultivation of sugarcane.⁵¹ Some smallholder peasants also profited from high food grain prices. Apart from the excellent harvest of 1939-40 the wartime harvests were below average and contributed to the scarcity of grain. Harcourt contends that from mid-1942 onwards the threat of worsening scarcity created anxiety among the peasantry, and hence they launched themselves into protest when the initiation of the Quit India revolt provided them with an opportunity to express their discontent. His argument does not take account of the fact, however, that in a situation of increasing scarcity and rising prices many peasants who produced both for subsistence and the market could afford to sell a smaller amount than hitherto of their cash crop to earn cash to pay their rent, and thus could (if their cash crop was a food grain) consume more, or else have more disposable income from the sale of the rest of their surplus, or else could store a portion of their crop as insurance against an adverse future season. In June 1943, when the scarcity was even worse than in the previous year, the Bihar authorities had this to say:

One of the reasons why disorder has not appeared in the rural areas may be that ordinarily the Indian cultivator, after paying his rent, takes care to keep in hand sufficient grain for the next year's seeds.

And the following month they commented thus on the situation:

The cultivator and the petty landlord who are prospering as a result of the high prices of grain are expected to remain aloof if there is any revival of trouble. But the daily wage earner in urban areas and the landless agricultural labourer in the interior might be a source of trouble.⁵²

⁵¹ Padri AAR 1349 Fa (1942-3) f 16D3, C Padri, G 1942-3, RDA.

⁵² FR(2) June 1943, GB FR(1) July 1943.

Certainly economic circumstances in the early 1940s were difficult, but at least some smallholders may have compared them favourably with the price-slump conditions of the 1930s, when the impossibility of meeting rent and debt obligations exposed them to litigation and eviction. Because they were surviving reasonably well, many smallholder peasants had no distinct economic motive to engage in the Quit India revolt. When they did become involved they did so because of antagonism to the police and the administration, because of sympathy for the nationalist cause, and because of encouragement from those above them in the social hierarchy. Harcourt suggests that peasant smallholders took the leading part in the Quit India revolt. The evidence indicates, however, that the role of these middle peasants was secondary to that of groups from opposite ends of the social spectrum, namely the locally powerful, Congress-supporting rich peasants and small landlords at one extreme and the poor and the landless at the other.

It may be of some interest here to refer to Herbert Heidenreich's account of the disturbances in Bihar in 1965, for it helps to illuminate, by comparison, the nature of participation in the 1942 revolt. Heidenreich's article, 'The Anatomy of a Riot: A Case Study from Bihar, 1965',⁵³ begins thus:

During the week of 9-15 August 1965 the state of Bihar in northern India was shaken by a series of violent riots. A demonstration before the State Assembly building in Patna on Monday 9 August disintegrated into a pitched battle between the police on one side, and protesting students, government employees, and political agitators on the other. The disturbances spread quickly to other parts of the state and by Thursday the headlines of the Patna *Searchlight* declared 'Lawlessness Grips Whole Bihar'. The police resorted to firing in eighteen places throughout the state as railway stations were sacked, government offices and homes of Cabinet members burned, and warehouses looted. Order was finally restored after five days; in many places only when army units were deployed.

The apparent similarities with the 1942 revolt scarcely need emphasis. Consider also his observations as given below:

The reasons for the violence in Rampur sub-division are complex, and there is no simple explanation for the course which events took. The most important factors, however, are student unrest, the food and price problem,

⁵³ *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 6:2 (July 1968), pp. 107-24. See especially pp. 107, 110, 111-12, 116, 118 for the excerpts quoted and other references to Heidenreich's article.

dissident Congressmen, personal feuds, *goondas* and unruly elements, and the Socialist and Communist Party organisations. At the base of most of these factors is a general feeling of frustration and hopelessness regarding the government's ability to recognise and successfully cope with the problems confronting the general public.

The events of 1965 strongly resemble those of 1942 in that in both situations political grievances were exacerbated by heavy repression at a time of acute scarcity. Heidenreich comments on the way in which four militants were able easily to encourage students and villagers engaged in a nominally peaceful demonstration to launch a violent attack on the police, and records as follows the unsought martyr's funeral achieved by an uninvolved passer-by who was killed by a stray bullet in a police firing.

The servant who had been shot died at about 7.00 p.m. When his body was released by the medical officials, the students placed it on a cot and for two hours took out a procession on the major roads of the town. No one attempted to stop them although Section 144 of the Criminal Code had been put into effect. The students required all the people they met on the road, including constables, to pay respect to the body. The body was taken to the college compound at 9.30, where the Principal addressed the students briefly. Then the students took the body to the Ganges for cremation.

It is indeed evocative of the inequities of Bihar society that a man who, when alive, would receive only disdain from students became, when killed in unusual circumstances, an object whereby the students could symbolize their antagonism to the administration and the police.

Heidenreich also notes that on the morning before a major student-led march 'as early at 6.00 a.m. villagers from the area north of Rampur were sitting along the railway tracks near the station and the government godown (warehouse). All the villagers carried empty jute bags, apparently in the expectation of looting the godown. In the bazaar area many villagers from Sonapur and Bhagipur were gathering near the godowns of several of the large grain merchants.' Later, when the march had begun, 'the villagers... hoping to loot the grain shops and godowns during the expected violence, also joined'. Because of its basis in a combination of personal observation and extensive interviewing Heidenreich's account makes convincing reading. And even if only approximately accurate its findings fit in

with the presence of a tradition of grain-looting by the poor during times of scarcity. Given sufficient pressure of privation such activity might occur at any time, but when political circumstances were especially favourable such phenomena were liable to occur, all the more, as demonstrated, for example, in market-looting (in the name of Gandhi and Swaraj) during the Non-cooperation Movement of 1920-2, peasant participation in student-led riots in 1965, and the subaltern rebellion which formed such an important element of the 1942 revolt.

The Quit India revolt drew in a broad spectrum of the population and temporarily crippled the apparatus of British rule. But despite the insurgents' initial success, the British, by deploying large bodies of troops, soon re-established themselves. Initially they used troops to secure the headquarters towns and the lines of communication, and then they sent them out to pacify the villages and to support the police in the imposition of heavy collective fines. Within a few days of the arrival of troops in an area, the mass participation phase of the movement ceased, to be replaced by a lengthy phase of sporadic guerilla warfare. The British re-established control quickly, partly because at the time of the insurrection they had at their disposal a massive military force which had been concentrated in order to face the Japanese. And under war censorship, they could repress revolt ruthlessly without worrying about domestic or international opinion. Moreover, they had developed a siege mentality, and had determined to cope relentlessly with disruptions to their war effort. Often the British employed harsh measures, and to protect its agents from subsequent prosecution the government enacted a retrospective Act of Indemnity. As the Beguserai subdivisional officer reported:

Along with the arrival of the troops no doubt the control of the situation became easier but another problem arose namely the control over the military against excesses: there were three unfortunate incidents: on the 24th August, a military party came from Samastipur to village Meghoul, but [burnt?] about 2 dozen houses and shot 3 men of which 2 died: this party selected Meghoul as they learnt that the people of Meghoul had taken some part in the loot of Rosera Railway Station in Darbhanga District. A day or two afterwards, another party of troops of Hassanpur came to Bakhri and burnt some houses. On the 28th August, the troops of Barauni Junction, went to the adjoining village Sograha and they shot one man dead and burnt 2 houses. To meet the situation Addl. District Magistrate Mr. Walmsley and Mr. Major Hope came. After 28.8 there

was no further incident burning of houses or shooting but occasional assault on the villagers, by way of whipping continued for some time more.⁵⁴

With a similar degree of understatement, the manager of the Raj Darbhanga circle of Jhanjharpur in Bhagalpur wrote thus on 24 September:

Since the recent agitation I am daily receiving information from villages that people are not in perfect peace of mind as villages are daily being raided by the police both day and night and people being arrested. This has created another panic in the minds of the people because it is not known to them when their houses will either be burnt or looted by the police or who amongst them will be arrested.⁵⁵

The capacity of the rebels to endure repression was restricted by their poor armament. Armed with spears, lathis and axes they first challenged policemen carrying muskets and then encountered soldiers armed with magazine rifles and machine guns and supported by air power. In one instance, students hurled brick-bats at British soldiers in a goods-train travelling from Samastipur to Muzaffarpur. The troops opened fire, killing twelve of them.⁵⁶ The rebels also displayed great tactical naivety. There were few attacks under cover of night and little attempt at concealment. An exception occurred at Marhowrah village in Saran district, where a crowd of villagers emerged from the cover of a tall standing maize crop and massacred five British soldiers and an Anglo-Indian civilian.⁵⁷ Only later, after the high point of the movement had passed, did greater tactical sophistication develop. Moreover, the widespread sabotage of communications combined with the flooding caused by the monsoon to limit the overall co-ordination of the revolt.

Obviously, just as the initial successes of the revolt can be explained partly by the relative weakness of the coercive apparatus of the state, so its rapid suppression may be explained partly by reference to the deficiencies of the rebels' military efforts in the face of harsh repression

⁵⁴ Beguserai Report.

⁵⁵ Jhanjharpur Manager to Chief Manager, 24 Sept. 1942, f 16A2, C Head Office, G 1942-3, RDA. For further details of repression, see Datta, *op. cit.*, and Niblett, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ Superintendent Police Laheria Sarai to Government of Bihar, 4 Feb. 1953, List of Killed, FMP f 69, 1942.

⁵⁷ H. P. Sinha, Saran District Officer, to Chief Secretary, 29 Jan. 1943, FMP f 84, 1942, BSA; GB FR(1) Dec. 1942.

by massive force. However it is also clear that the *limitations of the rebels' challenge to the colonial state were inseparable from the dual quality of the revolt.* The crucial weakness of the revolt was the absence of enduring goals which could bind together its different elements. Those engaged in the elite nationalist uprising sought to protest against government repression of Congress and to demand the granting of independence to India. In contrast, those involved in the subaltern rebellion acted in pursuit of relief from privation and in protest against the misery in which they found themselves.

Once heavy government repression was brought to bear, incorporating a programme of terror implemented by the military, the support of the poorer sections of the population for the revolt fell away. More enduring support could perhaps have been won if the programme of the revolt had incorporated radical aims.

Many of those active in the Quit India revolt were driven by economic hardship, and for a period they operated in a context in which British rule had temporarily broken down. This might seem to have been an appropriate situation for the development of agrarian radicalism. The British administration had always supported the landlords, and during the 1930s officials and police had worked to contain extensive peasant protest. Surely the absence of an apparatus to maintain public order and protect rights in property offered an ideal opportunity for the initiation of agrarian protest? But despite these apparently favourable circumstances, no agrarian protest developed during and immediately after August 1942. The insurgents made very few attacks on property other than on that belonging to the government. And even the few attacks on landlord property were not given ideological justification as part of an agrarian movement.

The non-development of radicalism at the time of the Quit India revolt resulted partly from the dominant role in initiating and directing protest played by small landlord members of the Congress. In addition many of the better-off peasants who had taken part in the kisan movement in the 1930s were, in the early 1940s, benefiting from the high prices of agricultural produce. In the 1940s they found it easy to meet their rent obligations, and through moneylending and grain dealing they profited handsomely from the acute wartime credit and grain shortage. Hence their involvement in the Quit India revolt did not result from economic pressure. In contrast, their participation derived from loyalty to the Congress, sympathy with nationalism,

antagonism to the police, and the feeling that the collapse of British rule was at hand.

The position taken by most left-wing activists also contributed to the absence of radicalism. The Left was divided over the question of the insurrection. While Jaya Prakash Narayan and the other Congress Socialists supported it, the communists did not. In Bihar Swami Sahajanand, the left-wing leader who had commanded the most extensive popularity in the 1930s, shared the view of the Communist Party of India, namely that the revolt should be opposed and India should instead back Britain and the Soviet Union in their 'People's War' against the threat of fascism. Not all communists, it should be noted, adhered to the policy of their party: for, as the Begusarai Subdivisional Officer reported,

The communists joined the movement: their leader Comrade Brahamdeo Narain Singh, who had been released from detention shortly before the movement, took the lead in the raid against thana and post office of Teghra.⁵⁸

Agrarian protest also did not develop because, to the chagrin of the British who had always looked to them for support, most landlords either remained neutral or else supported the Congress.⁵⁹ The Maharaja of Darbhanga, for example, refused to supply the authorities with the assistance of the armed guards whom he employed to protect his treasury. He justified his refusal by claiming that the guards could not be relied upon to fire at demonstrators who might perhaps include their kinsmen, caste fellows or fellow villagers.⁶⁰ But, no doubt, another reason for this refusal was that he had no wish to direct popular discontent against himself and his property. In the event those involved in the Quit India revolt took no action against the Raj Darbhanga. The manager of the Parihar circle which lay in the Sitamarhi Sub-division of Muzaffarpur, subsequently reported as follows:

⁵⁸ See *Appendix*, Section 3.

⁵⁹ For examples of landlords who supported the revolt, see GB FR(1) June 1943; Chandrika Prasad, 'Statement', 30 May 1952, FMP f 84, 1920-42, BSA. On the inaction of the zamindars see Governor of Bihar to Viceroy, Telegram XX, 2 Sept. 1942; Stewart to Linlithgow, 19 Sept. and 12 Oct. 1942, all in Mss Eur F 125/49, IOL.

⁶⁰ Interview with Umapathi Tewari, former Raj Darbhanga official, Dumeri village, Darbhanga, 17 Oct. 1976.

In the month of August last there was an unprecedented congress movement in the sub division. The Sub Divisional officer and several Sub Inspectors of Police were murdered. . . . There was no agitation whatsoever against the Raj and in spite of the above movement Raj works were never suspended.

In the Bhawanipur circle in Purnea where the insurgents stormed a *thana* and burnt alive three of its defenders, there were also no attacks on the Raj Darbhanga. According to the manager of the Nishankpur circle in north Bhagalpur, 'the political disturbances started in the month of August. It first took shape in the form of strikes in the Higher English school at Madhipura, the cutting of telegraph wires, the dislocation of railway communications and the forcible closing of both the Civil and Criminal courts at Madhepura and Supaul. Though the disturbances were widespread . . . there was no harm done to the Raj anywhere.' And from Padri circle in Darbhanga, a storm centre of kisan protest in the 1930s, the manager commented that 'an unparalleled congress rebellion of terrible magnitude reared its head and within a week crippled and paralysed the Govt. . . . Hasanpore road railway station was burnt down and looted, fish plates [were] removed, wires [were] cut and road breached [and] culverts smashed.' The manager does not mention, however, any occasion on which this popular fervour was directed against the Raj Darbhanga.⁶¹

This is not very different from the situation in Azamgarh in the United Provinces as described by R. H. Niblett:

Though there were incidents everywhere, the people on the whole, showed remarkable restraint. Once a set of instructions was found. The people were especially directed to attack communications; but they were also advised not to interfere with the Muslim population, and to pay their rents to all zamindars, who did not actively oppose the movement. . . . The only instance of an attack on private property was at Kajha. This is the headquarters of the one remaining European zamindari in the district. The proprietress, an aged lady, now resides at Calcutta. Her Manager, Mr. . . . had taken over charge only three months previously. He was surrounded by an unruly mob, which seized his gun; but allowed him to escape. The property within the bungalow was destroyed, and the granaries of the estate were looted.⁶²

⁶¹ Parihar AAR 1349 Fa (1941-2), submitted 1 Aug. 1943, f 16D2, C Parihar; Nishankpur AAR 1349 Fa (1941-2), submitted 17 Feb. 1943, f 16D1, C Nishankpur; Bhawanipur AAR 1349 Fa (1941-2), no date, f 16D2, C Bhawanipur; Padri AAR 1349 Fa (1941-2), no date, f 16D3, C Padri; all G 1942-3, RDA.

⁶² Niblett, op. cit., pp. 28-9. Name deleted from the original.

This mounting of an attack on the 'one remaining European zamindari' was, it seems probable, motivated by nationalist, anti-European feeling rather than by agrarian discontent.

Indeed, in addition to avoiding popular antagonism, the landlords were able to reap advantage from the dissatisfaction caused by military repression. The manager of the Padri circle commented that after order had been restored the

tenants were saved . . . from military and police atrocities by very prompt action taken by the Chief Manager and his constant attention towards this bringing pressure on [the] S[uperintendent] P[olice], [the] District Magistrate and [the] Samastipur S[ub] D[ivisional] O[fficer] . . . Protection from military tortures brought [the] tenants under very heavy obligation to the Raj. As a consequence [the] Padri tenants willingly contributed rupees 6,000 towards [the] Christmas fund. Not a single Padri tenant was allowed to be arrested although a huge number was made accused . . . whose names still appear in the absconders printed list.

The artful response of the Raj Darbhanga management to the insurrection is also indicated by the remark of the Nishankpur manager that his 'Tahsildars worked very smoothly and tactfully to put a stop to the movement and its after-effects'.⁶³

The failure to secure continuing broad support through radical or, at least, reformist initiatives made inevitable the ultimate defeat of the final, guerilla phase of the insurrection. From September onwards small bands of rebels engaged in guerilla warfare. They often allied themselves with professional dacoits, and not infrequently politically inspired banditry became difficult to distinguish from its non-political counterpart. The leading band of rebel dacoits was led by Siaram Singh. Singh's band was active for several weeks in the south Monghyr and south Bhagalpur area, where it received considerable support from his Bhumihaar caste fellows. Eventually police pressure forced the band to move north of the Ganges, to seek the shelter of the jungle country of the Kosi basin. Siaram Singh's band engaged in a series of fund-raising robberies, waged a campaign of terror against *chaukidars* and other collaborators with government, and in August 1943 made a strong attack on a police outpost in the Sonbarsa police circle in Bhagalpur. However the attack failed when the police were given prior warning of what had been planned as a surprise, pre-dawn attack by a member of a low caste group which suffered

⁶³ Padri and Nishankpur reports cited in footnote 61.

oppression from the local Bhumihars.⁶⁴ The warning of the police reveals that support for the guerilla bands was limited now that the subaltern rebellion had dissipated in the absence of radical initiatives and under the weight of British repression. Of similar significance was the November 1942 report to the effect that 'in village after village in North Bhagalpur one Jagannath Mandal, a Congress leader, could get no shelter and was at last arrested'.⁶⁵

Many of the guerillas took refuge over the border in Nepal. At first the Nepal authorities took little action against them, despite their nominally close relations with the British.⁶⁶ The Nepal Government seems to have decided to wait and see whether the British Raj survived the challenges posed by the revolt and by the war with Japan before taking firm action. Eventually, in response to strong pressure from the British, the Nepal authorities began rounding up the rebels, but their measures against them were never as vigorous and effective as those south of the border.

The guerilla movement received a great fillip on 9 November when Jaya Prakash Narayan, Ramnandan Misra and four other Left activists escaped from Hazaribagh jail in south Bihar. Narayan made his way to Nepal, where he attempted to co-ordinate guerilla activity and to lay the foundations for a renewal of mass agitation. He kept in touch with underground workers by special courier, and set up a training camp to give workers instruction in military tactics and in the use of fire-arms and explosives.⁶⁷

The Nepal authorities, prodded by the British, arrested Narayan and some of his supporters and confined them in the Hanumannagar jail. But in May 1943 a force of fifty rebels raided the jail and rescued

⁶⁴ GB FR(2) Mar. 1943; GB FR(2) Apr. 1943; GB FR(2) Aug. 1943; GB FR(1) Sept. 1943; GB FR(2) Oct. 1943; J. W. Houlton, Bhagalpur Commissioner, to Y. A. Godbole, Chief Secretary, 1 Sept, 1943, FMP f 91, 1942-3, BSA; Bhagalpur Commissioner to Chief Secretary GB, 9 June 1944, FMP f 95, 1943-5, BSA; Purnea District Magistrate to Chief Secretary, 24 June 1944, FMP f 94, 1942, BSA; Datta, *op. cit.*, pp. 275-88.

⁶⁵ GB FR(1) Nov. 1942.

⁶⁶ Telegram, Foreign Office, New Delhi, to Minister, Kathmandu, 26 Nov. 1942; Extract from Demi-Official Letter 20388, 29 Dec. 1942; Note on Conference at Muzaffarpur, 27 Sept. 1942; all in Hp f 3/39/1942, NAI.

⁶⁷ Datta, *op. cit.*, pp. 268-74; Bihar Fortnightly Reports for 1943; Harcourt, 'The "Quit India" Movement', p. 64.

Narayan and six other activists. Narayan returned to India and operated underground until captured in September 1943. Guerilla activity would continue for several months more, but as Harcourt comments, the arrest of Narayan marked the end of the main period of underground activity. By late 1943 the British had arrested many underground workers, had broken up or put heavy pressure on the rebel bands, and had at last managed to bring down the crime rate.⁶⁸

To defeat the mass upsurge and its guerilla aftermath the British were obliged to deploy large detachments of troops and to improve the size and efficiency of the police force. They raised the pay of the police, recruited a large number of additional police, procured arms from far and wide to ensure that every police station was equipped with at least six efficiency fire-arms, and gave the police more training in the use of these weapons. In north Bhagalpur, where rebel bands were especially active, the authorities set up the new sub-district of Saharsa, and in north Monghyr and north Bhagalpur they established five new armed police posts. The authorities also overhauled the arrangements for the collection of intelligence, and began paying the *chaukidars* a special war bonus.⁶⁹ Thus by strengthening their coercive apparatus, and in the absence of an enduring ground swell of active popular support for the insurrection, the British managed to retain control.

In sum, in Bihar and the eastern United Provinces the great revolt of 1942 consisted of an elite nationalist uprising combined with a subaltern rebellion. The duality of the insurrection gave it great impetus, in that it called forth the enthusiasm and energies of a broad spectrum of society. However the essential incoherence of the insurrection, given its dual character, proved to be a fatal weakness, and by unleashing massive repression the British were able to re-establish their position.

⁶⁸ See the Bihar Fortnightly Reports for 1943. The second report for December notes that 'the monthly number of dacoities has been halved since last July and is now not far from the Triennial average'.

⁶⁹ GB FR(2) Sept. 1942; GB FR(1) Jan. 1943; Supplementary report for the second half of April for the Bhagalpur Division, enclosed with GB FR(1) May 1943; GB FR(2) June 1944; Provincial Conference Proceedings, pp. 19-20, 56.

Appendix

'Report on Civil Disobedience Movement'

1. *Introductory*

This subdivision of Begusarai was primarily a pro-congress subdivision which had played an important part in previous C. D. Movement specially in the movement of 1930 and a few subsequent years. In these movements the activities were confined to this subdivision, but this subdivision supplied talk of the volume to keep the movement sing [strong?] in the rest of the district. Those facts are already before the Authorities and I need not narrate: I simply mention that the grounding was already there from long before specially among the Bhumihar community which on account of numerical strength, solvency, unity, physical strength and stubbornness, practically form the leading community in majority of villages.

The congress had their organisation in about every village more or less: the youngmen of villages, specially the Bhumihars had an inherent tendency to work as volunteers under congress flag on any occasion. These village organisations were in their best form at the time of congress Government after the fall of congress Government, there was marked decline, but in many villages they maintained it; the village teachers played an important part in maintaining the organisation of congress.

So the groundings for the any form of C. D. movement were ready from before.

2. a) The news of the arrest of All India leaders caused wide agitation specially among the congressites and the student section. On the 10th August there was strike in practically all H. E. Schools in the subdivision except Ballia where the strike began on 11.8.42. The students moved in processions in town shouting slogans: the procession either started after the meeting or ended in procession. Till then the sixteen point programme of congress had not reached Begusarai: but it began to reach from the 11th August and onwards: most of the important places in the subdivision got the so-called programme of congress High Command: on the morning of 11.8.42, there was some lull over it and many students of Begusarai H. E. Schools attended

⁷⁰ *Source:* Report submitted by Begusarai Subdivisional Officer, 7 Dec. 1942, held in Freedom Movement Papers, File 45, 1945, Bihar State Archives. Spelling, punctuation and expression as in the original.

classes but from the noon of 11.8.42 the all round lawlessness started. So on 10.8.42 and 11.8.42 the movement was practically limited to the students; then activities in strike in school started—hoisting of flag in schools and procession in the bazar.

On 12.8.42, the students took one strike formed: in most places, young congress leaders began to join the students and began to lead the students; the strike of the students continued: small minority of students joined classes but other students who were on strike, forced all students to come out of school: then they began their aggressive action against Government building. Till then mobs were not very strong numerically: so they did not go beyond entering the thana and court compound and hoisting the congress flag over the buildings; in hoisting the flags, they generally took us by surprise; the flags were removed almost immediately after the hoisting. Only two railway stations namely Bachhwara and Lakhminia were attacked on this day.

Till 12.8.42, the activities were mostly limited to local students, but they felt that they can not continue the movement unless they get support from the mass: young volunteers were deputed to villages to organise volunteers. From 13.8.42 rural volunteers began to pour in; bigger procession moved about in the town for longer periods, shouting Anti-Government slogans. The Ballia thana and Bakhri Out Post were attacked on this date; at Ballia P.S. the papers of thana and uniform of constables were burnt; at Bakhri Out post some furniture was broken.

On this day the attack on the railway station began; the passenger trains were detained by students at some stations and passenger in European class were insulted: the Railway telegraph line between Begusarai-Lakho, Begusarai-Tilrath, Barauni-Rupnagar were cut, and the sabotage of railway line began in mass scale.

From the afternoon of 13.8.42, the rural mob began to take the upper hand and the student section began to loose prominence. The rural mob began to concentrate to profitable concern. A mob consisting of the residents of villages round about Barauni Junction began doing mischief to the yard Barauni Junction on the afternoon of 13.8.42. A section of this mob, then proceeded to Rupnagar, burnt the refugee camp of Rupnagar, destroyed the Railway station and looted the wagon that was standing in that station.

On 14.8.42 the situation was completely out of the hands of the students: the looters got complete upperhand: in order to keep the hold the younger section of the congress began to support the action of the looters and even joined: the sober section did not approve it but they had no hold at that time.

On 14.8.42 the several railway stations were more or less looted. The loot of Barauni Junction was most unfortunate: in the morning looting and damage were mostly towards the distant part of the yard: but the Anglo Indian Officer of the Railway station became panicky; on the midday a troop train came from Simariaghat and proceeded towards Muzaffarpur: the Anglo

Indian staff left Barauni Junction in the same troop train, leaving the station in charge of Indian subordinates: after that a loot of the station in mass scale began. I had no information of the loot till 15.8.42. But I wanted to send an armed force to Teghra and arranged a small bus: when the bus was about to start I got information that the road has been cut at several places and the road has been blocked by falling trees. In Begusarai town, the mob made attempt to attack the thana and stood for sometime on the road in front of the thana, but they listened to warnings and could see that we are prepared for the attack: so the mob did not enter the compound and dispersed.

On the evening of 14.8.52 at 6.15 the information incident of escape of prisoners from Begusarai jail. It was quite unexpected and had little to do with the C. D. movement: in the escape, the congress had nothing to do either directly or indirectly; it was a definite act of negligence of the jail staff. The thana constables ran after the escape of prisoners and could capture only one: soon it became dark and the escaped prisoners escaped in the makai fields.

The same evening there was also looting of the Begusarai goods shed: the information was received by me very late: an armed force was deputed: looting was about over by that time: the looters mostly fled away on the approach of armed force: some rounds were fixed but due to darkness they missed: 19 looters were arrested on the spot.

On 15.8.42 the lawlessness of the mob continued in the same way as on the previous day: except in Begusarai town, the mob had things more or less in their own way: the morale of public and Government offices had gone down: even the armed force gave signs of hesitation: the whole town at most place was full of rumours: all communications were stopped: reports to District Magistrate were sent to Monghry with special messengers: it was a part of the programme of congress to spread exaggerated stories of success of lawlessness to influence the morale of Government officers. On this date the Teghra thana and Post Office were also looted.

In Begusarai town, the looting of the town was attempted: a party of 300 looters came to the bazar to loot shops, but armed force was immediately sent: the mob dispersed: about a dozen were arrested on suspicion.

16.8.42 was at most places, a day of little activities: most of the railway stations had already been looted: the Govt. buildings at important places had also been attacked more or less: so they had no attractive programme: the only attractive programme now before this was the attack on the treasury and that was no easy task: volunteers were sent out to the villages to collect men for the attack on treasury. The only important incident of the day was the looting of the Bariarpur P.S. which had remained intact till then.

17.8.42 – On 17.8 there was practically no event anywhere except Begusarai town: in the eye of the congress, the mufasil-thana towns had already been captured by them: so the only place that remained to be captured was

Begusarai town: from the morning, strict picketing against court attendance by litigant public was started.

At about 12 noon a mob came to the criminal court compound shouting slogans etc.: I was ready with armed force: on warning being given, the mob remained on the other side of the drain: then there was a misfire and that scared away some of the mob: in the meantime, some of the sober leaders came and took away the mob. In the evening, a huge meeting was held in which the men collected for looting the treasury and was addressed by Babu Ramadhin Singh and a few other sensible leaders: they were advised against any attempt on the treasury: the intending looters went back home showering abuses on these leaders.

This 17th August was practically last date of the 1st phase of C. D. movement in this subdivision.

b) The second phase of C. D. movement starts on the 18th August, on the night of the 17th a fresh batch of armed force reached Ballia by boat under Mr. R. Ojha, I.C.S., and Mr. Judge Sergeant Major: this arrival of the extra armed force had some effect on Ballia Bazar: on 18.8.42 ... this force reached Begusarai town: they brought with them the thana staff of Ballia. This arrival of the extra force completely improved the morale of local officers.

The same evening Mr. Ojha proceeded towards Teghra with about 2/3rd of the force and 1/3rd was left with me at the town. Mr. Ojha first went to Barauni Junction, Railway Station; the loot and damage to the properties at the railway station was about over. On the morning he established control over the railway station and on 19.8.42 he proceeded to Teghra: they established some control over the town, withdrew the thana staff and Registry office staff; and returned to Barauni Junction: they made Barauni Junction their headquarters and from there they tried restoration of communication both road and rail.

We, at Begusarai, started taking the armed force to the mufassil, began restoration of road communication in Begusarai, Ballia and Bariarpur thana. The burning petrol, saved at Barauni junction was a great help to us: we had not a drop of petrol: on 19.8.42 we got one tin, and that was spent up in runs within the town: now we were constantly moving about in the interior with armed force.

The curfew order was already passed by the District Magistrate previous to that I had passed order under section 144 Cr. P.C. prohibiting unlawful assembly. From the night of 18.8 we began rigidly enforcing the order: for that we moved about at night with force. On the night of 19.8, a batch of volunteers went out to break the curfew order; the whole batch was arrested: unfortunately among them, there were certain notorious student leaders.

When we were moving about with the armed force in the mufassil we, nowhere met with any opportunity nor did we see any mob anywhere. No

doubt, we were master of the situation wherever we went but we did not consider the thana staff safe at the posts, even on departure of armed force. By that time, a few of the congress huts had been destroyed by the party of Mr. Ojha and there had been few deaths by shootings; we apprehended that the mob may take revenge on the thana staff. So we brought back the staff of rural thanas to Begusarai.

c) In this subdivision, a sharp line of demarcation can not lie down between the 2nd phase and 3rd phase. As we have noted above, the arrests began long earlier and practically there was no formation of mob at places where we had force. But we may roughly say that the third phase began on or about 22nd August; when the congress workers felt that they had no chance of any activity in headquarters and places approachable from headquarters so they retired to the interior with programme of village organisation, and suspension of choukidari tax. The entire road communication between Ballia to Teghra was restored by the 24th August: by the 27th restoration was extended both ways upto end of the subdivision.

The first restoration of railway communication was between Samastipur and Barauni Junction: the restoration started for both directions and by the 25th it was listed up except a bridge; along with restoration of the railway communication a small party of troops came from Samastipur and were posted at Barauni Junction.

Along with the restoration of communication, we also began the recovery of the looted properties: when the road communication was restored we paid full attention to the programme and began raiding village after village, specially the village notorious for the loot: we got complete upperhand, the force and Magistrate met with any opposition except in Bihat the armed force and a few troops had gone to the village while coming back a mob attempted to attack the force; one man was shot dead by armed police.

With the arrival of troops, all hopes of the congress to revive the situation was gone; so practically after the 3rd week of August, there were very little activities of congress except that at some places, they repeated their damage to the railway line which was long restored but this activity also stopped as the patrol of railway lines was started by the troops.

Along with the arrival of the troops no doubt the control of the situation became easier but another problem arose namely the control over the military against excesses: there were three unfortunate incidents: on the 24 August, a military party came from Samastipur to village Meghoul, but about 2 dozen houses and shot 3 men of which 2 died: this party selected Meghoul as they learnt that the people of Meghoul had taken some part in the loot of Rosera Railway Station in Darbhanga District. A day or two afterwards, another party of troops of Hassanpur came to Bakhri and burnt some houses. On the 28th August the troops of Barauni Junction, went to the adjoining village

Sograha and they shot one man dead and burnt 2 houses. To meet the situation Addl. District Magistrate Mr. Walmsley and Mr. Major Hope came. After 28.8 there was no further incident burning of houses or shooting but occasional assault on the villages, by way of whipping continued for sometime more.

On the 28th August, the R.M.S. of Barauni Junction was opened; the dak was brought by patrol train up to Barauni Junction. We brought the dak from Barauni Junction in bus to Begusarai. Thus the postal communication was restored on the 28th August.

In the first week of September, the situation further improved: on the 1st September the Ballia thana and Teghra thana were restored: the S.I. Bakhri was sent back earlier i.e. on the 28th August: the last rural thana to be restored was Bariarpur and that on the 6th September with all thana offices a small armed force was also supplied for the emergency. As Teghra thana was worst affected a bigger force was placed there with a Magistrate they began re-establishing control over the interior. The search and arrest in the villages continued: the choukidars and daffadars began attending the thana and information of the interior began to reach us: in the beginning of 2nd week even the interior was considered under control: the touring officer began to tour freely: the process-servers went out to serve processes.

d) In this subdivision, the fourth phase began in the second week of September: by that time, the authorities were completely on top and it was only a question of bringing the situation to normal and punishment of wrong doers.

Along with the restoration of the thana, the cases were instituted: the arrests were different problem: surprise raids of villages were attempted: a few were arrested but after rounds the culprits left their village and concealed in makai *kbet* specially towards Diara. Immediately arrests improved: special arrangements were made and special officers were deputed: moveable and immovable properties began to be seized: in several cases, the dwelling houses were seized and sealed up after padlocking.

The trial of the C.D. movement cases began.

3. As I have noted above the school students started the movement: they were joined by all section of congress workers: the sober section of congress, tried to keep the movement under control, but when they allow village mass to join, it became an economic question: the vast properties specially food-grains at the railway station attracted them. Then the situation was no longer in the hands of congress. The loot did remain confined in the hands of any particular section: anybody who had opportunity, did utilise. The muslims were also took part in loot, though in a lesser degree. The menial staff of the railway stations joined in the loot at many stations. Of the villagers, the Bhumihars and the poor labourers took prominent part in the loot.

The merchants class in outlying stations were at the mercy of the congress during the first phase. But somehow, they managed to get the leaders in their sides and thereby saved their property from loot: at some places, they got hold of the leaders by making payment to the congress cause: at some places they joined the movement to some extent: but on the first arrival of force, they gave up the side of congress.

The non-congress intelligencia, showed pro-congress tendency in the first phase. The members of the Bar & Mukhtear Association suspended practice which they continued more or less till end of August. Some of these no doubt did so through fear of picketeers but if they wanted, they could easily attend the court. In fact, about half a dozen of them did attend court inspite of all attempts by the other party.

The muslim league remained neutral: they did nothing against the movement.

The Hindu Mahasabha was almost non-existent, except a few leaders who were helpless, the Mahasabhaites had joined the Civil Disobedience movement.

The communists joined the movement: their leader Comrade Brahamdeo Narain Singh, who had been released from detention shortly before the movement, took the lead in the raid against thana and post office of Teghra.

4. One or two police officers of outlying thanas completely lost morale, one the repeated attempts of the mob; the highly exaggerated rumours of assaults on Government officer of other district and subdivision played a part in affecting the moral of officers. But otherwise, all police officers and other officers played their part without hesitation.

Special difficulties which we experienced in the administration of the subdivision were want of communication and want of armed force in the beginning: the armed force that were posted at Begusarai just before the movement was taken away to Gogri: by the time this force came back, the rail and road communications were cut off: secondly we had absolutely no petrol in the town: we could not take out the armed force for want of conveyance and petrol. So, to meet similar situation in future, we must have a small mobile armed force: for the purpose we should have a bus to accommodate about 20 men and a good stock of petrol.

5. The events in the month of November shows that the congress is trying to keep the movement alive: they have not got any complete programme nor the leaders can supply them any: so the over-active workers are being guided by the incidents in other provinces: the newspapers are acting as very good guide to them. The attempts to burn the school building in Begusarai town and its suburbs, were immediately attended to by us: we at once drew up the scheme of a heavy collective fine on Begusarai town and its suburbs: the villages near about Rudauli tried to revive the movement by bringing out fresh procession.

Immediate collective fine was imposed on villages Rudauli and Manopur. The mounted force was brought and it had demonstrative march. These had some immediate effect.

Another important factor was the absconding leaders: as a joint effect of all sort of measure, several leaders were arrested towards the end of November and some more in December but others have also been netted as quickly as possible.

6. *Conclusion*

- 1) The outlying stations can not depend on the help to come from sub-divisional headquarters: there should have some arrangement whereby they protect themselves from a mob of fair size.
- 2) The mufassil subdivision can only depend on the help to come from district headquarters. Besides, the armed force at the treasury, there should be posted a small armed force of at least 1-20.
- 3) Subdivisional Officer should have some arrangements utilizing their armed force, as a mobile force: for the purposes they should have one bus and a stock of at least 50 tins of petrol.
- 4) There should be leanind ground in each subdivisional headquarters.
- 5) Even a small armed force of 1-20 can easily disperse the mob of any size: most mobs will run away at the approach of armed force: even a determined mob cannot stand firing.

Tactful handling of the situation saves many unnecessary shootings and consequent death. But excess of it should be avoided; by that time, the situation is likely to develop and may necessitate a heavier casualty.

Subdivisional Officer
Begusarai

Memo No. 345C. Dated 21.12.42

Report submitted to the District Magistrate, Monghyr, with reference to his D.O. No. 2274 Con, dated 7.12.42.

Subdivisional Officer
Begusarai

Appendix of incidents concerning Civil Disobedience movement from the period from the beginning of the movement till 30th November 1942 arranged in chronological order.

12.8.42

(1) G.R. 924/42 Begusarai P.S. dated 12.8.42 u/s 395/436 I.P.C.

This case is concerning the criminal trespass rioting and theft of properties from Lakhminia railway station. The records which were removed from the railway station were also burnt by the mob.

(2) G.R. 991/42 Begusarai P.S. 1 dated 7.9.42 u/s 395/436 I.P.C.

This is a case of loot and arson by the mob at the Bachhwāre Railway Station; the looting of this railway station began on this day.

(3) 1049/42 Begusarai P.S. 29 dated 26.9.42 u/s 143/448 I.P.C. 38 D.I. Rules

A mob of about 3 hundred person of Bakhri Bazar and neighbouring villages went to Bakhri P.S. and padlocked the post office building after the demonstration. Records were not damaged by the mob as they had already been removed by the Post Master to his residence.

13.8.42

(4) 923/42 Bariarpur P.S. 10 dated 13.8.42 u/s 143/448 I.P.C. 35 D.I. Rules

A mob came from Manjhaul and entered the Manjhaul Post and Telegraph Office; they padlocked the Post Office building and cut the telegraph wire.

(5) 930/42 Begusarai P.S. 27 dated 13.8.42 u/s 448/147 I.P.C. 38 D.I. Rules

This case is concerning the attack on Bakhri Beat House in which the congress mob hoisted flag over the Beat House building and damaged some furniture.

(6) 941/42 G.R.P. Barauni Junc. 7 d/ 13.8.42 u/s 395/436 I.P.C.

A big mob came to Rupnagar from the direction of Barauni Junc.; they first burnt Rupnagar refugee camp huts and went to the Rupnagar Railway station; they removed some records from the railway station and burnt them; they went to the workshop godown and removed some tools from the place; from there they went to Baya Bridge and tried to do some damage to the bridge but they again returned to the railway station and looted the property from the wagons of the goods train which was standing on that station.

(7) 942/42 Ballia P.S. 11 d/23.8.42 u/s 395/435 I.P.C.

On this day a big mob attacked Ballia P.S. at about 11 A.M.; they removed the records and burnt them in the thana compound; they also removed some miscellaneous things from the thana.

(8) 993/42 GRP Khagaria. 3d/13.8.42 u/s 395/126 Railway Act

A mob of about 5 hundred men went to Sahebpurkamal Rly. Stn. and looted the railway property.

(9) 1048/42 Begusarai P.S. 30 d/26.9.42 u/s 143 I.P.C./38 D.I. Rules

A mob of about 2 hundred congress men attacked the liquor shop of Bakhri bazar and destroyed the liquors.

(10) 1050/42 Ballia P.S. 13 d/26.9.42 u/s 448 I.P.C./38 D.I. Rules

A mob went to the Excise Office of Chhote Ballia, forcibly took out some records and burnt them.

(11) 1055/42 Ballia P.S. 14 d/30.9.42 u/s 35 D.I. Rules

The congress mob went to Lakhminia P.S. and cut the Telegraph wire.

(12) 1061/42 Ballia P.S. 3 d/3.10.42 u/s 341 I.P.C./38 D.I. Rules

A mob of about 150 congress men went to the Parihara village post office, padlocked the P.O. building and hoisted flag over.

(13) 1155/42 Ballia P.S. 19 d/20.10.42 u/s 448 I.P.C./38 D.I. Rules

A mob of about 150 went to the liquor and Ganja shop of Parihara and caused some damage by destroying Ganja and liquor worth Rs. 50/-.

(14) 1156/42 Ballia P.S. 20 d/20.10.42 u/s 448 I.P.C./38 D.I. Rules

A mob went to the liquor shop of Pachbir P.S. Ballia and destroyed the Ganja and liquor worth about Rs. 85/-.

(15) 1157/42 Ballia P.S. 21 d/20.10.42 u/s 448 I.P.C./38 D.I. Rules

A mob went to the liquor and Ganja shop of Chharapati P.S. Ballia and destroyed the liquor and Ganja worth about Rs. 130/-.

(16) 1163/42 Ballia P.S. 22 d/22.10.42 u/s 143/380 I.P.C.

A mob went to the Excise shop of Chhoti Ballia; they looted and destroyed the properties worth about Rs. 30/-.

(17) 1178/42 G.R.P. Barauni Jnc. 6/d/ 13.8.42 u/s 126 Rly. Act

Some students removed the Telegraph wires and uprooted the telegraph posts between Barauni Junction and Teghra.

14.8.42

(18) 932/42 G.R.P. Barauni Junc. 8 d/14.8.42 u/s 395 I.P.C./38 D.I. Rules

This case is regarding burning and looting of the Loco Shed of Barauni Junc. and European running room and booking office etc. the same day Barauni Flag Railway Station was also looted and destroyed by a section of the same mob; about 5 thousand men of the surrounding villages joined in this loot.

(19) 935/42 G.R.P. Barauni Junc. 10 d/16.8.42 u/s 147/380 I.P.C.

In the evening the Begusarai goods shed was looted and practically all the grain bags and other commodities which were lying in the goods shed that evening were removed by the looters on receipt of information armed force was deputed and about 2 dozen looters were arrested on the spot.

(20) 936/42 Begusarai 29 d/14.8.42 u/s 224/225 I.P.C.

This case is regarding the escape of the prisoners from the Begusarai subjail;

about 75 persons escaped from the jail of whom 2 were arrested on the spot same evening and quite a large number have been arrested since. This incident is not directly connected with the C.D. movement but taking advantage of the movement and utilizing carelessness of the jail staff the prisoners overpowered warders they had opened the jail and they ran away in a body.

(21) 939/42 Begusarai No. 29 dated 14.8.42 u/s 35 D.I. Rules

The telegraph line between the railway station and the post office of Begusarai was cut.

(22) 952/42 Teghra case No. 27 d/22.8.42 u/s 341/353 I.P.C.

A mob mostly of students went to the Registry office of Teghra entered the building, obstructed the staff to enter into the office and finally padlocked the office; they left threat that if any attempt be made to open the padlock they will come again and burn the records.

(23) 972/42 Teghra case No. 27 d/22.8.42 u/s 341/353 I.P.C.

A mob of about 100 persons went to the Banwaripur village post office and removed some articles.

(24) 992/42 GRP Barauni Junc. 2 d/7.9.42 u/s 395/436 I.P.C.

A mob of about 4 or 5 hundred people came to the Teghra railway station from the direction of Barauni station; they looted the properties from the station and also wagons and also set fire to the records and station building; the contents of the wagons about 16 in number continued for more than a day.

(25) 1154/42 G.R.P.S. Barauni Junc. 2 d/7.9.42 u/s 395/436 I.P.C.

This case is regarding loot of the Tilrath Railway station the property of the railway station was mostly looted or damaged.

(26) 1170/42 G.R. Samastipur 11 d/14.8.42 u/s 395/435 I.P.C.

The congress mob attacked the Salouna Railway Station; did damage to the railway line and railway telegraph and also looted away properties from the railway station and wagons.

(27) 1176/42 Teghra case No. 30 d/27.10.42 u/s 448 I.P.C.

A mob of about 7 or 8 youngmen entered the Post office of Mansurchak P.S. Teghra and padlocked the building after hoisting congress flag.

(28) 933/42 G.R.P.S. Barauni Junc. 9 dated 15.8.42 u/s 395/436 I.P.C.

This case is regarding further looting of Barauni Junc. railway station by the looters of the surrounding villages.

(29) 950/42 Teghra case No. 26 d/21.8.42 u/s 395/436 I.P.C.

This case is regarding the loot of the Teghra P.S.; a mob of about 4 or 5

thousand men came and attacked the thana and looted the thana property and burnt the thana records and uniforms of constables.

(30) 955/42 Teghra case No. 28 d/26.8.42 u/s 395 I.P.C.

The same mob after looting the P.S. went to the Post office and looted the Post office property worth about 4 hundred rupees; they did not cause any damage to the post office records.

(31) 970/42 Teghra case No. 6 d/5.9.42 u/s 395 I.P.C.

The post office of Bachhwara was attacked and looted; in this occurrence the mob was rather cruel on the female members of the family of the Post Master; they remove some ornaments from the wife of the Postmaster; they removed some cash and postal stamp and also damaged the records of the post office.

(32) 994/42 G.R.P.S. Khagaria 4 d/15.8.42 u/s 395 I.P.C.

On same day a mob of about 3 hundred men attacked the Monghyr Ghat railway station, looted the goods that were in the wagon and also did considerable damage to the station and station properties; they did not burn the station buildings though they were made of straw.

(33) 1368/42 G.R.P.S. Barauni Junc. 3 3/13.12.42 u/s 395 I.P.C.

A mob of about 5 hundred students attacked the Lakho Rly. station and removed properties of the railway station after doing considerable damage to the lines and other instruments of the railway station.

16.12.42

(34) 934/42 G.R.P.S. Barauni Jnc. 11 d/16.8.42 u/s 395 I.P.C.

This case is concerning the continuation of loot and damage to the railway station of Barauni Junction and in particular about the loot of the G.R.P. office and register and its properties.

(35) 948/42 Bariarpur case No. 14 d/21.8.42 u/s 395/435 I.P.C.

Police station of Bariarpur was attacked on this day by big mob of 2 thousand men; they burnt the thana papers and also looted away the properties about Rs. 200/-; they did not do damage to the thana building.

(36) 956/42 Teghra case No. 29 d/26.8.42 u/s 395 I.P.C.

This case is regarding the 2nd attack on the post office of Teghra; that day they also looted away some cash and other articles from the Post Office.

16.8.42

(37) G.R. 1047/42 Begusarai case No. 28 d/26.9.42 u/s 448/143 38 D.I. Rules

In village Samsa P. S. Bakhri under Begusarai thana and took away uniforms of the choukidars of the village and burnt them.

17.8.42

(38) 958/42 G.R. Barauni Junc. P.S. 12 d/30.8.42 u/s 395/436 I.P.C.

The Simariaghat railway station was looted on this day; about 2 thousand men of the surrounding villages attacked station and looted away properties from the station and station yard.

18.8.42

(39) 965/42 Ballia case No. 1 d/3.9.42 u/s 144/380 I.P.C.

This is the 2nd attack on the Ballia P.S.; this attack was made after the thana staff had been withdrawn to Begusarai the mob did some damage to the thana building and also furniture.

19.8.42

(40) 998/42 Teghra P.S. case No. 15 d/3.9.42 u/s 143/379 I.P.C.

In village Rudauli P.S. Teghra the local mob snatched away the uniforms of the chaukidars.

23.8.42

(41) 963/42 Teghra case No. 1 d/1.9.42 u/s 148/326 I.P.C./34b D.I. Rules

In village Manopur P.S. Teghra the mob had cut the hand of one Dhanpat Mahton and entirely chopped off the portion beyond wrist. It is alleged by Dhanpat that he was asked by the mob to join in doing damage to the railway line and on his refusal he was thus punished; but there is another version of the occurrence that this Dhanpat who is a notorious bad character had looted makai of a certain bania; the congress workers of the locality sat over the judgement and inflicted punishment on him that his right hand should be chopped off, but the case is under trial and the truth will probably come out from the trial.

24.8.42

(42) 995/42 G.R.P.S. Khagaria – 9 d/24.8.42 u/s 395 I.P.C.

This case is regarding 2nd attack on Sahebpurkamal Railway station when some properties were looted away from the goods train.

8.9.42

(43) 987/42 Ballia case No. 6 dated 7.9.42 u/s 143/379 I.P.C.

The letter box of Ballia Post office was stolen away by unknown hands.

(44) 1009/42 Begusarai case No. 16 dated 12.9.42 u/s 35 D.I. Rules

On this day the telegraph line between Tiltrath and Begusarai was being repaired; near village Amraul an youngman was found cutting one of the wires after it has been repaired. Attempts were made to find out this man but he escaped undetected and unidentified.

10.10.42

(45) 1265/42 Ballia case No. 10 d/16.11.42 u/s 170/171/420 I.P.C.

An attempt was made by Janardan Jha to get hold of a gun license of Nakcheddi Mahto of Chamrahi P. D. Ballia posing himself as a Government Officer; he was caught red-handed on the spot and the case is under trial.

4/5.11.42

(46) 1197/42 Begusarai 8 d/4.11.42 u/s 436 I.P.C.

This case is concerning burning of K.K.H.E. School building; on the night between 4th and 5th November, 1942, some known hands possibly some students set fire to the thatch of the building; soon large number of residents of the locality collected and extinguished the fire. The thatch of the 3 or 4 rooms of the school building was completely burnt; no furniture or records were destroyed.

?.11.42

(47) 1218/42—Teghra case No. 14 d/7.11.42 u/s 38 D.I.R.

A congress procession was taken out in village Rudauli & Manopur; about 2 dozen out of the volunteers had uniforms on.

(48) 1220/42 Begusarai case No. 17 d/1.11.42 u/s 436 I.P.C.

On the same night some unknown hands set fire to the M.E. school of Bishanpur which adjoins Begusarai town; this very soon detected and the fire was extinguished after a portion of the thatch only a few cubits in length was damaged.

8.11.42

(49) 1219/42 Teghra P.S. case No. 15 d/8.11.42 u/s 56 D.I. Rules

A procession was taken out in village Dadpur P.S. Teghra by a small mob.

9.11.42

1236/42 G.R.P.S. Barauni Junc. 1 d/9.11.42 u/s 126 Rly. Act

In village Pokharia within ½ mile from Begusarai railway station a chisel-shaped piece of iron was put between two railway lines apparently with a view to cause derailment but luckily by the running of train over the piece of iron it was partially bent and partially bent through; so it could not achieve object.

Subdivisional Officer,
Begusarai

AAR	Annual Administrative Report, Raj Darbhanga
AICCP	All-India Congress Committee Papers
BSA	Bihar State Archives
C	Collection
f, F	file
Fa	Fasli
FMP	Freedom Movement Papers
FR	Fortnightly Report
FR(1)	Fortnightly Report for first half of month
FR(2)	Fortnightly Report for second half of month
G	General Department, Raj Darbhanga Archives
GB	Government of Bihar
GBEN	Government of Bengal
GBO	Government of Bihar and Orissa
GGB	Government of Great Britain
GOI	Government of India
HP	Home Political Department (of the Government of India)
JPNP	Jaya Prakash Narayan Papers
L	Law Department, Raj Darbhanga Archives
LR	Land Revenue Proceedings
Mss Eur	European Manuscripts Collection, India Office Library
NAI	National Archives of India
NML	Nehru Memorial Library
PP	Rajendra Prasad Papers
PS	Political Special Department [of the Government of Bihar (and Orissa)]
RDA	Raj Darbhanga Archives
WBA	West Bengal Archives

Agrarian Change from Above and Below: Bihar 1947-78

ARVIND N. DAS

1 *Introduction*

The aim of this essay is to study the two processes of agrarian transformation in India—one from above and the other from below—and to understand their relative importance in one of the most backward parts of the country, namely, Bihar. We hope to demonstrate that to attribute agrarian change to ‘elite-sponsored land reform’, as has been done by some commentators,¹ is grossly erroneous and amounts indeed to a cruel joke on the people actually involved in the process of bringing about that change.

At the very outset we want to make it clear that even what we call ‘agrarian change from above’ was not a process unilaterally initiated and sponsored by the elite. It was rather its response to long-drawnout and militant peasant struggles either in the specific area under consideration or those which occurred elsewhere but had more than a local impact. The two major attempts at ‘agrarian change from above’ which we shall examine, that is, the unseizement of the Permanent Settlement through zamindari abolition carried out by the state and the gentle persuasion of the landlords to give away a part of their lands through *bhoodan* (facilitated by legislation on the subject), were indeed responses to peasant discontent. The first followed after

¹ For a typical instance of such false attribution see P. C. Joshi, ‘Land Reform and Agrarian Change in India and Pakistan since 1947’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1:1-2 (1974). Agrarian change in India and Pakistan, says the author, ‘is the result of various socio-economic programmes, including land reform, introduced by ruling elites which took over the reins of political power on the termination of British rule. *A study of agrarian change therefore is to begin with, a study of elite-sponsored land reform*’. (Emphasis added)

years of agitation by the powerful Kisan Sabha and the second came on the heels of the militant communist-led peasant upsurge in Telengana and sought to pre-empt class war in the Bihar countryside. Nevertheless, coming as they did from the top, both had inherent limitations and only marginally, if at all, altered the existing agrarian situation.

As against these the peasants in different settings in Bihar were, in their own ways, trying to bring about agrarian change spontaneously as well as through consciously organized movements dealing with specific issues and situations. Since the death of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and the disintegration of the Kisan Sabha in consequence of certain decisions adopted by various political parties,² it was assumed that the organized peasant movement had been emasculated, that it 'had lost its mass support' and 'the political and economic conditions . . . introduced . . . in the post-war and independence years . . . restricted and ended the prospect for continued [peasant] activity'.³ The peasantry of Bihar has repeatedly proved such assumptions to be wrong. An examination of both the organized movements and sporadic agrarian unrest (the two are by no means isolated from each other) shows that their contribution to agrarian change has not been inconsiderable.

II *Agrarian Change from Above*

Although by the time independence had been achieved, the organized peasant movement in Bihar had split itself up into so many factions that it had lost much of its vigour, the sentiments generated and the ideas aroused by it compelled the state to try to reform the agrarian structure, lest peasant fury become uncontrollable and result in overthrowing the very institution of private property as in China.⁴ In order, thus, to pre-empt the action of the peasantry various official and unofficial measures of agrarian reform were initiated in the form

² Arvind N. Das, *Agrarian Unrest and Socio-economic Change in Bihar* (Delhi, 1982), pp. 199-252.

³ Walter Hauser, 'Peasant Organisation in India: A Case Study of the Bihar Kisan Sabha, 1929-1942', Ph.D. thesis, Chicago University, 1961.

⁴ K. B. Sahay pointed out in the Bihar Legislative Council that 'the various tenancy measures passed by the Government would constitute a bulwark against Communism. Communists have penetrated into some industrial areas but they have no [*sic*] place in the rural areas and this was due to various relief measures adopted for the tenantry.' *Bihar Legislative Council Progs*, 17 May 1949 (Patna, 1949).

of legislation, public projects, private schemes and even an appeal addressed to the conscience of the landlords to give away at least some of their lands in *bhoodan*. At times these processes preceded agrarian unrest and at others followed them. In all they did manage to change rural Bihar to an extent, but the change was neither complete nor necessarily aimed at ameliorating the misery of the rural poor. As for official actions, after more than two decades of effort, the government itself concluded that its programmes had been 'more favourable to the larger owner-farmer than to the smaller tenant-farmer', while a share-cropper and the landless labourer had been 'more often than not left out in the cold', so that disparities widened, 'accentuating social tensions'.⁵ Non-official attempts of the Sarvodaya variety were evaluated after extensive survey as having led to 'a slow evolution of *junker*-dominated big peasant economy excruciatingly and slowly transforming itself from above without fundamental changes in the land-ownership pattern'. It was felt that the Sarvodaya movement was not even 'remotely leading anywhere near social and economic justice'.⁶ And yet there was no inconsiderable drama when these official and non-official moves were initiated.

The Abolition of Zamindari

No other measure of the Bihar Government generated so much controversy as the abolition of zamindari. The Legislative process itself took no less than five years to complete, so that the person most responsible for the reform, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, did not live to see the day when the 'Permanent Settlement in Bihar was permanently unsettled'.⁷

Zamindari abolition had been urged by the Kisan Sabha ever since its third Bihar conference in 1935. Other sections of political opinion had also been pressing for it. Even a section of the bureaucracy was against zamindari, and the peasantry, both organized and unorganized,

⁵ India, Home Ministry, Research and Policy Division, 'Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions', unpublished report, 1969, p. 4.

⁶ Pradhan H. Prasad, 'Sarvodaya and Development', *Journal of Social and Economic Studies (JOSES)*, 4:1.

⁷ Speech of the Bihar Premier, Dr Shri Krishna Sinha, in the Muzaffarpur district Kisan Conference at Riga (1945), cited by Ram Vilas Sinha, 'The Man Behind Zamindari Abolition in Bihar', *Searchlight*, 1 Sept. 1949.

were naturally in the forefront of the agitation for its abolition.⁸ By 1941 even some of the zamindars, though they did not agree to the outright abolition of the system, had started owning up to its evils and the need for improvement.⁹ And yet, the Indian National Congress, the party which came into power after the withdrawal of the British, was not only divided on the question but prevaricated in implementing its own promises. Of course, its commitment to abolish the zamindari system itself came rather late in the day, and it was not until December 1946, when the party had to go to the electorate that, for the first time, it referred to the question officially in its election manifesto:

The reform of the land system which is so urgently needed in India, involves the removal of intermediaries between the peasant and the State. The right of such intermediaries should therefore be acquired on payment of equitable compensation.¹⁰

Even after the Congress won the election in Bihar on the basis of this manifesto, it moved at an excruciatingly slow pace in the direction of abolishing zamindari. Peasant movements broke out in different parts of the state. There were serious movements on the question of *bakasht* lands and that of commutation of produce rent during 1946-8. The demand for zamindari abolition was voiced repeatedly in the course of all these struggles. The peasantry was not satisfied with remedial legislation like the Bakasht Disputes Settlement Act, 1947, because even the Revenue Minister admitted that landlords were 'already circumventing the provisions of the measure' by means of 'benami' settlements.¹¹

All this finally led the government to move the Bihar Abolition of

⁸ Bihar *Prantiya Kisan Sabha Ki Report, November 1929 se November 1935* (Patna, 1935). Resolution of the Congress Socialist Party at its conference at Champaran, *Searchlight*, 10 Jan. 1947. *India, Final Report of the Famine Inquiry Commission*, Madras 1945 (Delhi, 1945). For the resolutions of the different Kisan Sabhas, see *Searchlight*, 10 Jan. 1947—Forward Bloc; Feb. 1947—Congress Kisan Sabha; 3 Apr. 1947—Bihar Political Conference; 27 Apr. 1947—'Swami-ite' and Socialist; etc. Also interviews with Nakshatra Malakar, Jahoor Ali, Laxmi Mandal, etc., Purnea, Jan.-Feb. 1977.

⁹ P. D. Gupta, 'Must the Zamindari Go?', *Hindustan Review*, 74:442 (Dec. 1941).

¹⁰ AICC, *Congress Election Manifesto 1946* (Delhi, n.d.).

¹¹ Bihar, *Legislative Council Proceedings 21 March 1947* (Patna, 1947). *Searchlight*, *Indian Nation* and *Hunkar* of 1947-9 are replete with reports of peasant movements.

Zamindari Bill in the Assembly in 1947. The inordinate delay in this prompted even the Birla-owned *Searchlight* to remark editorially at the time how the landlords of the province had been 'moving heaven and earth to prevent the materialisation of the long overdue reform in the agrarian economy', and how 'all this time people have wondered what the Government have been doing to redeem the undertaking given by them'.¹² The zamindars indeed moved heaven and earth to prevent, or at least stall, the abolition of zamindari, and it was natural that they should do so when even Dumraon, a lesser zamindar among the big ones in Bihar, had an annual rental income of 100,000 pounds sterling.¹³ However, it was the bigger zamindars who protested most. Opposition within the legislature was voiced mainly by Shyamnandan Sahay and Sir Chandreshwar Prasad Narain Sinha and outside the Assembly by Kamkhya Narain Singh, Raja of Ramgarh.¹⁴ Later on resistance to the Bill was mooted in the courts by Maharajadhiraj Sir Kameshwar Singh of Darbhanga, the biggest zamindar of them all. But the smaller zamindars too joined the fray. They launched a three-pronged attack—assaults on the tenants, wooing of Congress leaders and obstructing the passage of the Bill and implementation of the Act respectively through filibustering in the Assembly and dilatory tactics in the courts.

There was a systematic campaign conducted by the zamindars in 1947-9 to demoralize the tenantry by physical attacks on the kisans and their leaders. A Zamindar Youth League was organized 'to find ways and means to save themselves'.¹⁵ Attempts were made to take forcible possession of *bakasht* and other lands occupied by the tenants and in the clashes which occurred at Bihat (Begusarai), Ramgarhwa (Champan), Barahiya (Monghyr), Ballipur (Darbhanga), Pathua (Monghyr), Madhepur (Darbhanga), Mahuri (Biharsharif), Sassaram (Gaya), Darigaon (Arrah), Alwarpur (Patna), Nabiganj (Gaya), Kursela (Purnea) and many other places, many

¹² *Searchlight*, 15 Mar. 1947.

¹³ Sachidanand Sinha, 'Recollections and Reminiscences of a Long Life—VIII', *Hindustan Review* 81:504 (March 1947).

¹⁴ Bihar, *Legislative Assembly Progs*, 1946-48. For the activities of the Raja of Ramgarh in this respect see *Searchlight*, 10-11 May 1947.

¹⁵ *Searchlight*, 19 Jan. 1947.

tenants were killed and many others were maimed and seriously injured.¹⁶ A few zamindars and their retainers also suffered.¹⁷ When the landlords saw that direct repression was not sufficient, they even threatened to have the tenants' villages bombed from the air. The police and other functionaries of the state were drafted in to protect 'law and order' and several peasants died at their hands too.¹⁸ Even this did not help silence the demands for the abolition of zamindari. So the landlords began to spread slander against pro-abolition leaders like K. B. Sahay, the Revenue Minister of the Bihar Government, and threatened 'direct action'. But they suffered some humiliation when Sahay sued their leading newspaper, *The Indian Nation*, owned by the Maharajahdiraj of Darbhanga, for libel and the paper had to apologize. As for 'direct action against the Government', they were warned that this would '*precipitate the agrarian revolution that Government [had] been keeping in check*'.¹⁹ Since nothing else seemed to succeed, the zamindars tried to get Sahay dropped from the Ministry. That move was forestalled by protests to the Congress High Command from Sahajanand and others. Then, just a few days before the Zamindari Abolition Bill was to be introduced in the Assembly, Sahay was run over and seriously injured in a motor accident. Undaunted by these developments however, he, with the support of all progressive opinion inside and outside the legislature and all the Kisan Sabhas—C.P.I., Swami-ite, Forward Bloc-ist, Socialist, etc.,—finally introduced the Bill in the Assembly with a blood-stained bandage on his forehead almost symbolizing the

¹⁶ For details of these incidents see *ibid.*, 20 Mar., 3 and 21 Apr., 19 and 20 May, 9 June, 11, 15 and 18 July, and 12, 14 and 22 Aug. 1947. These newspaper reports are in most cases corroborated by entries in Sahajanand's diaries, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi.

¹⁷ 'Ears and Nose of [Muzaffarpur] Zamindar's Diwan Chopped Off', *Searchlight*, 12 May 1947. This method was adopted to punish cruel zamindars and their *amlas* in Purnea also. Interviews with Nakshatra Malakar.

¹⁸ *Searchlight*, 6 Oct. and 20 Mar. 1947. See also Sahajanand, 'Statement on the Masaurha Firing', *Hunkar*, 26 Mar. 1947. Among the more prominent Kisan leaders, Karpoori Thakur and Bhogendra Jha were arrested and many cases were started against peasants. Bihar, Director of Publicity, 'Orders Issued on Land Disputes', *Searchlight*, 22 Mar. 1948.

¹⁹ 'Secret Behind Zamindari Abolition', *Indian Nation*, 26 Mar. 1947, 6 Apr. 1948, etc. *Searchlight*, 10 Apr., 25 July and 1 Oct. 1947. (Emphasis added)

struggle that had to be waged to achieve even this limited measure of agrarian reform.²⁰

In addition to physical assault, the zamindars also tried to prevent the abolition of landlordism by lobbying the Congress leaders who were not all unsympathetic. To start with, they canvassed the Father of the Nation himself. 'In a Prayer Meeting at Patna Gandhiji said he had also a visit from the zamindars who, among other things, had complained of growing lawlessness among peasantry and labour. He deplored the fact . . . Such lawlessness was criminal and bound to involve the very peasantry and labour in ruin'. Statements like this did much to boost the morale of the zamindars, but Gandhi who had made of ambiguity a fine art, was also reported on a later occasion to have spoken against the zamindars: 'In his post-prayer speech Mahatma Gandhi spoke, *for the first time*, unreservedly against the zamindari system and said that this system was bound to go . . . The Mahatma also referred to the report that *many zamindars were busy organising private armies*, perhaps to browbeat the tillers of the soil. *He wished the news were not true*'.²¹

He expressed no such wish, however, in castigating the tenants for their reported acts of violence, and continued to do so even after Ramnandan Mishra, a Socialist Kisan Sabha leader, wrote to him putting the record straight:

The report of your speech published in today's *Indian Nation* is unjust and unfair . . . There is a great danger of your speech being used by pro-landlord officers in crushing the peaceful and yet powerful movement in Kisans . . . The very basis of the present struggle going on in every part of the province is force and violence-backed efforts of the landlords for ejecting kisans from their lands . . . As regards violence being resorted [to] by the landlords apart from forced dispossessions, I am attaching a list of murders, brutal assassinations and incendiaries. The list is not exhaustive but just illustrative . . . I am giving below a few lines from a magisterial report:

'The first party are reported to be turbulent people and No. 1 (Babu Baij

²⁰ Telegram from Sahajanand to Congress High Command, dated 24 July 1947: *Sahajanand Papers*, NMML, New Delhi. Resolution of BPKS, etc.: *ibid.* Resolution of BPKS Executive, 18 Dec. 1947, etc.: *Kisan Sabha Papers with Panchanan Sharma, Barahiya*. Interviews with Jagdeo Prasad, Patna, 17 Apr. 1974. *Bihar, Legislative Assembly Progs*, 1947. *Searchlight*, 14 Jan., 17 and 21 Apr., 12 and 13 Sept. 1947.

²¹ *Searchlight*, 19 Apr. and 10 Aug. 1947. (Emphasis added)

Nath Singh of Barhaiya) is better known in the area as Hitler. He has engaged a large number of hired lathials and with their help he appears determined to commit all sorts of high handedness in the area He has succeeded to win over some leading men of the area and taking advantage of all these things he is bent upon to commit Zulum taking law in his own hands.' What Kisans are face to face [sic] is the last ditch struggle of the dying aristocracy of Bihar. . . . Preparations are afoot on a Hitler style to crush us. But if we go down, nothing can save the Congress and those who profess in your creed . . . I beseech you on behalf of the oppressed and terrorised Kisans not to prejudice their case by charging them with violence.²²

Far less ambiguous was the support zamindars received from other Congressmen, the most prominent among them being Rajendra Prasad, the first President of the Republic of India. Prasad, whose family had for long served the Hathwa Raj as its employees and held a small zamindari itself,²³ was expected to be sympathetic towards the zamindars—as indeed he turned out to be in full measure. In 1947 a group of zamindars appealed to him by telegram to say, 'Kindly Drop Abolition Zamindari *Save Country Civil War*'.²⁴ It was, of course, not possible for Prasad publicly to go against the stated policy of the Congress. However, he tried to delay zamindari abolition as much as possible and chastised Sahay for being so prompt in implementing the Congress Manifesto. 'I can understand the abolition of Zamindari', he wrote. 'The Congress had sanctioned that, but I do not think there is any sanction in the Congress Resolution for forcibly dispossessing people of their property before they have been compensated for it.' He went on to warn that the proposed legislation would 'affect the entire economic life of the Province', and suggested that more time be taken to think about it. Sahay replied, 'So far as I am concerned, I feel that in order to rehabilitate the position of the Congress it is necessary that the Bills [relating to Zamindari Abolition] should be proceeded with.' Defiantly, he enclosed for Prasad's perusal a copy of the Bihar State Acquisition of Zamindari Bill, 1949.²⁵ But such gestures did not shame

²² Open letter from Ramnandan Mishra to Gandhi, dated 20 April 1947: *Sahajanand Papers*, NMML, New Delhi.

²³ Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*.

²⁴ Cited in F. Tomasson Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crises in India: The Case of Bihar* (New Delhi, 1974). (Emphasis added)

²⁵ Letter from Rajendra Prasad to K. B. Sahay, dated 27 Apr. 1947, and letter from K. B. Sahay to Rajendra Prasad, 1 May 1947, cited in Jannuzi, *op. cit.* Interview with K. B. Sahay, Hazaribagh, 10 Sept. 1972.

the Congress High Command and when in May 1947 they eventually approved zamindari abolition in Bihar it was too late to introduce the Bill in that particular session of the Assembly. Much valuable time was thus lost. 'The Congress High Command and the Congress Ministry', warned the *Searchlight*, 'will be risking a great deal . . . by appearing to be slow and hesitant'.²⁶ Indeed, the delay in legislation gave zamindars the time they needed to try to pre-empt the measures of the Bill when it was finally entered into the statute book.

Meanwhile the Bill was circulated among the Divisional Commissioners, Kisan Sabhas and Bar Associations. Among the latter the landlords managed to get some support as in Purnea where 'the bulk of the anti-abolition lawyers . . . are either retained lawyers of private estates or they look to the landlord class for briefs and fees'.²⁷ Other 'professionals' who were not so dependent on the zamindars urged the abolition of the system in a manner best suited to their own interests. Thus, the Bihar Chamber of Commerce suggested that an investment corporation should be floated by the government with a guaranteed minimum profit and that compensation to the zamindars should be given at least partly in shares of the corporation. At the same time the Champaran Agricultural Advisory Committee resolved that the Provincial Government be induced to legislate for the penalization of those persons who did not irrigate their crops when facilities were made available to them.²⁸

While these attempts were being made by the nascent Bihari bourgeoisie to develop industrial capitalism and commercialization of agriculture, some of the Congress leaders and officials were openly exhibiting their solidarity with the landlords. One of the biggest landed magnates, Raghubarisa Prasad Singh of Kursela, was reported to have 'lavishly entertained' the Finance Minister, A. N. Sinha, and other Congress leaders during the four-day long festivity to celebrate the birth of his grandson. The Chief Minister, too, while generally favouring abolition, made it a point to warn the Kisan workers that 'mischief-makers among them will be treated as criminals'. Pro-landlord statements and attitudes such as these prompted a Patna daily to doubt at the time 'if many [of the leading Congressmen had

²⁶ *Searchlight*, 29 May 1947.

²⁷ *Searchlight*, 12 July 1947. Also interview with Kumar Bimlanand Sinha, Champagnagar (Banaili) Raj, Champagnagar, 14 Jan. 1977.

²⁸ *Searchlight*, 4 May and 31 July 1947.

indeed] got a clear conscience in respect of the abolition of the Zamindari system'. And even as the Zamindari Abolition Bill was about to be passed, Congress leaders like Sardar Patel raised the question of compensation. 'To take away Zamindaris without paying compensation would amount to robbery . . . compensation must be adequate and not nominal', he said, and strongly deplored the proposal that the Maharajadhiraja of Darbhanga, who had an annual income of Rs 60 lakhs, should get Rs 25 lakhs as compensation. 'How would they feel', he asked 'if they were put in his [Darbhanga's] position?' To which Sahajanand said that he would feel like a very happy criminal. In the view of the Kisan Sabha(s) compensation was 'legal dacoity'. Yet after the Bill was passed in the Assembly, discussion on it stopped in the Bihar Legislative Council 'on the advice of Dr Rajendra Prasad' who was to receive a landlords' deputation in Delhi, and when the Congress Working Committee met to consider the rates of compensation, the Kisan Sabhas went unrepresented while the zamindars were represented by a twelve-member deputation led by the Darbhanga Maharaja. Though the Bill was passed by the Council also, and assented to by the Governor, differences between the Bihar and Central Governments on the question of compensation held up the Governor-General's assent for some time. It was reported that the Government of India might even be 'inclined to postpone the measure by a few years'.²⁹

Thanks to such delays the zamindars gained five valuable years. Their tactic of utilizing the dilatory procedures in the legislature, administration and the courts paid off, as should be evident from the history of this legislation subsequent to its approval by the Governor-General on 6 June 1949 and its publication as the Bihar Abolition of Zamindari Act, 1949 (Bihar Act XVIII of 1949). The zamindars challenged its constitutionality in the courts which then issued injunctions restraining the State Government from implementing it. Subsequently, it was felt (following a suggestion by Rajendra Prasad³⁰) that the Act did not have provision enough for land reforms. So it was decided to repeal it and bring forward more comprehensive legislation in its place. Accordingly a new enactment

²⁹ *Searchlight*, 27 July, 27 Oct. and 24 Dec. 1947, and 10 Jan., 28 Apr., 3 May, 9 and 14 Aug. 1948. *Hunkar*, 29 Mar. 1947. *Bihar Legislative Assembly Progs*, 10 Sept. 1948.

³⁰ See Jannuzi, *op. cit.*

called the Bihar Land Reforms Bill was passed in 1949 and published with the assent of the President of India, under Article 31 (Clause 4) of the Constitution as an Act—the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950 (Bihar Act XXX of 1950). But this was challenged in the courts and the Patna High Court declared that it contravened Article 14 of the Constitution of India. The Central Government then introduced and Parliament passed the Constitution (First Amendment) Act³¹ validating the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950. The zamindars of Bihar thereupon challenged the constitutionality of the First Amendment itself in a suit brought before the Supreme Court of India which, however, upheld it. The landlord lobby then initiated yet further legal proceedings designed to test the constitutionality of the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950, and it was not until 1952 that a decision of the Supreme Court finally vindicated it.

It was thus that the legislative efforts of K. B. Sahay and the Bihar Government to unsettle the Permanent Settlement were frustrated for five whole years. Moreover, the provisions of the original proposal which had promised 'to replace the Zamindari system of land tenure by a Raiyatwari system under which the raiyats will hold their lands directly under the Provincial Government and to transfer to the Provincial Government all the rights of proprietors and tenure-holders in land, including rights in forests, fisheries and minerals',³² were considerably diluted. The government had won only a pyrrhic victory. The legislation hardly helped answer 'the question of questions' raised by Sahajanand: 'Which land tenure is sought to replace the zamindari tenure?' He had been perceptive enough to observe even as early as 1947 that 'the wording and phraseology of the Bill [was] vague', and its aim 'to remove all intermediaries between the Government and the raiyats' was bound to run into difficulties because of the imprecise character of the latter term.³³ The Government of Bihar did not even pause to consider such questions. Consequently, its agrarian reform legislation dealing with a ceiling on land holdings, consolidation of holdings, provision of minimum wages for agri-

³¹ India, Ministry of Law, *Constitution of India*, Articles 14 and 31A.

³² The wording is that of a draft of 'The Bihar State Acquisition of Zamindaries Bill, 1947', cited in Jannuzi. *op. cit.*

³³ Sahajanand, *Abolition of Zamindari: How to Achieve it?* (Patna, 1946); 'Zamindari Abolition: What Next?' *Searchlight*, 13 Sept. 1947; 'Address at the Bihar Kisan Conference, Jahanabad', *ibid.*, 6 July 1947.

cultural labour, etc., has been less than effective. Indeed, thirty years after this exercise was begun, it has been rightly observed:

*The ruling circles depend primarily on legislation as the instrument of agrarian reforms to the serious neglect of implementation. They believe that once legislation has been enacted the required socio-economic results would follow automatically The lack of political will has been a key factor behind ineffective implementation Implementation is in a large measure a function of degree of consciousness and organisation of the potential beneficiaries.*³⁴

And yet, every time, the 'potential beneficiaries' showed signs of 'consciousness and organisation' it was not only the state which set out to crush them, as during the 'red scares' of 1948-50 and 1968-78, but others as well who tried to suppress them. The foremost among such non-official efforts was that of the Sarvodayists.

The 'Gentle Persuasion': Bhoodan

The zamindari abolition legislation was followed almost immediately by one of the most repressive official campaigns in the history of Bihar. A 'Communist plot' was discovered and any attempt by the lower orders of the tenantry—under-tenants and share-croppers—and the agricultural labourers to organize themselves was seen as signs of the 'red menace'. In fact, the process had started even before Independence with all-India raids on offices of the C.P.I. Repression was indeed so widespread that it evoked some protest even in a section of the bourgeois press, for the 'issue involved [was] one of the right and liberties of the people'. A Public Safety Act was passed and its provisions were used to try to stop all mass movements by the peasantry. It was stated by the government that the Act was meant to check communal activities, but this was questioned. 'Complete suppression of Kisan demonstration on the score of communal tensions is not only undesirable', wrote the *Searchlight*, 'but if pressed too far may precipitate trouble'.³⁵

And trouble there was indeed. It was not only that 'the restrictions imposed by the Public Safety Act . . . operated to the special disadvantage of the Kisan'.³⁶ The actions of Congressmen themselves

³⁴ India, *National Commission on Agriculture 1976; Abridged Report* (New Delhi, 1977), pp. 683-4. (Emphasis added)

³⁵ *Searchlight*, 18 Jan. and 2 Apr. 1947.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 17 June 1947.

helped to cast doubt on the seriousness of the Bihar Government's intent to implement even such legislation as there was and produced grave discontent and unrest among the peasants. As long as the issues concerned the interest of the upper sections of the peasantry, made up mostly of the substantial tenants, there was some sympathy for their cause among politicians, bureaucrats and the media. However, as soon as the lower rungs of the peasant population started getting agitated, a massive anti-communist reaction set in. It is a measure of the ensuing hysteria that even the *Searchlight* which had been sympathetic before this towards the Kisan Sabhas and their struggles against landlordism, came out with screaming headlines such as, 'Red Activity on Kisan Front', 'Reds Attach Zamindar's Katchery', 'Reds Active Again', 'All-out Plan to Fight Red Menace', 'Red Terrorism', 'Reds out for chaos . . . Activities to Foment Unrest Among Kisans', etc. 'Communists are fomenting agricultural labour strikes, discontent and disorders', it reported, and mentioned that a veteran peasant leader, Kishori Prasanna Singh, was 'directing violence' and instigating 'Musahars, Chamars and other backward communities to . . . stop working in the fields of their masters'. As a further instance of the 'disaffection' provoked thus 'between the landlords and the Kisans' the paper referred to a dispute in Tulsipur village where agricultural workers, organized by communists, had withdrawn labour from the zamindars, thereby creating 'a good deal of bad blood' in fourteen villages of the Bilpur, Gopalpur and Nangachia *thanas*. Singh and several other peasant activists were promptly arrested and a punitive tax of about Rs 105,000 was imposed on the 'Red-Infested Villages'.³⁷ However, the more the repression was intensified the stronger became the resistance by the peasantry and, in places, even a Telengana-type of insurrection started being planned.³⁸

It was at this point that Vinoba Bhave who had started his Bhoodan movement in Telengana, intervened in Bihar also. Initially, his scheme for getting zamindars voluntarily to donate land for distribution among the landless seemed to have caught on. The peripatetic agrarian reformer attracted thousands wherever he decided to do his *padyatra*

³⁷ *Searchlight*, 21 Mar., 26 June, 7, 14, 23 and 24 July, 4 and 8 Aug. 1949. Also, interviews with Jaynarayan Singh, Tulsipur, 11 Mar. 1971, and with Nakshatra Malakar *et al.*

³⁸ Interviews with Nakshatra Malakar *et al.*

and after a few years even the former fire-brand revolutionary, Jaya Prakash Narayan, was persuaded to give up active politics and do *jeewan-dan* (gift of life) in the cause of Bhoodan and Sarvodaya.³⁹ With these two charismatic leaders in the forefront, it was believed that the movement would be able to generate enough enthusiasm to become a way of forestalling the spread of communism and emerge as a method 'of bringing about a peaceful revolution'. Bhave, in fact, mentioned that the object of the movement was to 'usher... in a new social order based on justice'. To this end, he resolved to remain in Bihar till the land problem was finally and completely solved. He estimated that he and his followers would need to collect 3,200,000 acres of land.⁴⁰ After two years of intensive Bhoodan activity in Bihar, Jaya Prakash Narayan announced in 1954 that the movement had not reached its target. Indeed, by August 1954, no more than 2,102,000 acres had been collected by way of actual or promised donation, and even as late as 1956 the total did not exceed 2,147,842 acres.⁴¹ In June that year Bhave left Bihar to carry his message of 'peaceful revolution' elsewhere.

Although Bhave departed from Bihar without having fulfilled his pledge, many of his followers stayed behind. However, in his absence, the movement gradually lost its momentum. Indeed all activity ceased except on those occasions when Jaya Prakash Narayan came to Bihar to push it forward. By 31 March 1966 the Bhoodan Yajna Committee had to admit officially that its total acreage of land collections had in fact decreased from 2,147,842 acres in 1956 to 2,137,787 acres over the ten-year period. Of this at least 500,000 acres, mainly contributed by the Raja of Ramgarh, was either forest land or legally contested lands. More damaging to the image of Bhoodan as a successful movement is the fact that by March 1966, its leaders could claim to have distributed no more than 311,037 acres comprising less than 10 per cent of the announced target.⁴² Some of what was distributed was

³⁹ Hallam Tennyson, *India's Walking Saint: The Story of Vinoba Bhave* (New York, 1955); Vinoba Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna* (Ahmedabad, 1953); Jaya Prakash Narayan, 'The Bhoodan Movement in India', *Asian Review* (Oct. 1955), pp. 271-4; Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, *Bihar Shows the Way* (New Delhi, 1977).

⁴⁰ Bhave, *op. cit.*, pp. 21, 111 and 114.

⁴¹ Tennyson, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 141; *Indian Nation*, 5 Apr. 1971; Jaya Prakash Narayan, *A Picture of Sarvodaya Social Order* (Tanjore, 1956), p. 47.

⁴² Nagarjuna, *Mahakarunik Buddha Ki Karun Katha* (Patna, 1960); N. J. Nanporia (ed.), *Times of India Directory and Yearbook, 1967* (Bombay, 1967), p. 131; Tennyson, *op. cit.*, p. 143; Jannuzi, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

simply waste land and, at least in one case, the gift lay at the bottom of a river.⁴³ The result was no 'peaceful revolution', brought about by the Bhoodan movement or the legislative measure (Bihar Bhoodan Yajna Act 1954) which institutionalized it. The movement only aroused hopes for some time, helped decrease communist attacks on the agrarian system and created an illusion among the peasants that some landlords were indeed generous and magnanimous.⁴⁴

Evaluation of 'Agrarian Reforms from the Top'

So much has been written elsewhere by scholars, bureaucrats and politicians about the limited effects of the agrarian reform legislation as well as of the Bhoodan-Sarvodaya attempts, that it is not necessary here to repeat their observations. Suffice it for our purpose to cite just two examples, one on the working of land reform legislation and the other on the Sarvodaya movement, which were encountered by the working Group on Land Reforms of the National Commission on Agriculture in April 1973, that is, more than twenty-five years after Independence.⁴⁵

During a visit to Pandaul Block of Madhubani district in north Bihar the Working Group found out that not a single *bataidar* (share-cropper) there had been recorded during a recently concluded survey and settlement field operation. In the course of its public investigations it came to hear of the murder of seven share-croppers at Selibeli by the 'Mahanth' of a religious trust. At this point of the hearing a representative of the landowners stood up and justified the killing, saying that the share-croppers had been 'politically motivated' and were 'looting' the crops belonging to the religious trust. For the Working Group such a blatant justification by a landowner of seven ghastly murders was evidence of 'the attitude and the strength of the

⁴³ Interview with peasants who were supposed to have received *bhoodan* lands, Nangola, Purnea, 16 Jan. 1977.

⁴⁴ In January 1977, when interviewing peasants within the zamindari of Mahanth Raghav Das in Banmankhi, Purnea, we asked them if they knew who Vinoba was. Indignantly and pitying us for our ignorance, they replied, 'Mahant-ji of course. He donated some land!' When we asked if they had received any, they replied in the negative. The land had been donated in 1954-5; in 1977 they were still landless. Interviews with Bhokhan Rishidev *et al.*, Banmankhi, 22 Jan. 1977.

⁴⁵ The extracts quoted in the following paragraph are taken from India, National Commission on Agriculture, Working Group on Land Reforms, 'A Field Study: Agrarian Relations in Two Bihar Districts', *Mainstream*, 11:40 (1973), pp. 13-15 and 18. Hereafter *WGLR*. (Emphasis added)

landowning class of the areas'. This impression was confirmed by their meetings with individual landowners who, far from being apologetic about their behaviour, '*went to the extent of openly questioning the right and the propriety of the State to enact such laws*' as these made them the objects of agitation by communists and 'other lawless elements'. The attitude of local officers, too, was found to be 'queer'. Apparently, '*the fact that no bataidar was recorded in spite of the law and the positive Government instruction on the subject, did not cause even slight embarrassment to the officers present*'. Indeed the landowners of Madhubani appeared to be so well 'organised and aggressive' and the administration so 'obliging' that, according to the Working Group, 'they are definitely not going to give up an iota of their rights, privileges and economic dominance without a stiff fight'. In such a situation, it concluded, 'no law, however good it may be, in conferring on paper right, title and interest on the bataidars will have the slightest chance of success *unless the bataidars have a strong and militant mass organisation of their own* capable of not only defending their own rights . . . but also capable of mounting counter-action to prevent and forestall any direct attack on them'. But what happens if the rural poor develop a 'strong and militant mass organisation of their own' is another story.

That story too is told by the same Working Group which also visited Musahari Block in Muzaffarpur district. This area had become famous in early 1970 because of 'Naxalite' activities. About half a dozen big landholders and usurious moneylenders were killed by poor peasants and landless labourers under the leadership of Raj Kishore Singh, a respected peasant leader of the area.⁴⁶ The agitators were promptly dubbed 'Naxalite extremists', partly because of the publicity given to the agitation by the then leader of the Naxalite movement in Bihar, Satyanarain Sinha, who described the actions of the peasants as having created a new 'Srikakulam in Bihar'.⁴⁷ Although the movement was limited in both area and activities, it created consternation in the highest levels of the government as well as among social reformers. Jaya Prakash Narayan, the former revolutionary Socialist who had by then become the venerable leader of the Sarvodaya movement, stated that the Naxalite threat was 'an urgent call to demonstrate through positive action how the challenge of

⁴⁶ Ibid. See also *Indian Nation*, 3 Jan. 1972.

⁴⁷ Satyanarain Sinha, *Liberation*, Aug. 1969

violence could be used to speed-up the process of non-violent social change and reconstruction that Vinobaji had initiated through his Gramdan-Gram Swaraj Movement'. To this end, he set up camp at Musahari and made it known that he would not leave the area until the Naxalite problem had been solved.⁴⁸

His presence attracted the attention of various organizations and the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD) came in a big way to develop the area. The State Government too started pumping funds through numerous developmental projects like Intensive Area Development (IADP), Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE), Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Project (PIREP), Job-oriented Education Plan Project (JOEPP), etc.⁴⁹ The result was that in 1975, even the District Magistrate of Musaffarpur admitted that Musahari suffered not from a lack of funds but from a surfeit of funds and developmental activity from above.⁵⁰ This was confirmed by the Chief Executive Officer of AVARD who assured the Working Group during its visit there in 1973 'that money was no problem'. He had as much as Rs 6,000,000 made available through an international agency called the Freedom From Hunger Campaign for a single and rather unimportant irrigation scheme for that small block. The Group was told that eighteen big landowning families held most of the land of Musahari block. In clear violation of the ceiling law, a retired civil servant owned 1,500 acres, out of which he gave 20 bighas to the Gram Swaraj movement, presumably 'as lump insurance premium against any future social unrest'. No one *bataidar* was recorded at Musahari in the course of the revisional settlement which had just recently been carried out there. Many among the local poor were forced to work as *bataidars* or farm hands on their own lands against debts and cumulative interest owed to moneylenders. As the study from which these facts are taken, put it:

With three and a half 'Katcha' seers of inferior grains as daily wages, with long spells of unemployment, with large number of mouths to feed

⁴⁸ Jaya Prakash Narayan, *Face to Face* (New Delhi, 1971); 'Bare Be-abroo Hokaar Tere Kooche Se Ham Nikale', *Janayuddha*, Sept. 1970.

⁴⁹ Pradhan H. Prasad, 'Evaluation of PIREP in Musahari'; and Arvind N. Das *et al.*, 'Job-oriented Education Plan Project in Musahari and Chandi Blocks'. Unpublished reports, A. N. S. Institute (Patna, 1975).

⁵⁰ Interview with J. S. Sanglura, District Magistrate, Muzaffarpur, 4 Aug. 1975.

per family, field rats would continue to be the staple source of protein for Musahars (rat eaters?) of Musahari for quite some time to come. With the concentration of land in a few hands, it was only inevitable that all the benefits of the developmental activities of AVARD and the like agencies would accrue only to the big landowners. *What crumbs the rural poor would collect in future might be a matter of conjecture, but we had definite evidence to indicate that at Musahari the bread had already gone to the rural rich.*⁵¹

Thus by 1973 it was already clear that Jaya Prakash Narayan and his cohorts had by no means been able to solve the problem of Musahari. Yet, like Vinoba, Narayan too did not wait to redeem his pledge. After about a year and a half he left the area. Neither he nor his associates liked the evaluation of their efforts as published in the report of the Working Group.⁵² In 1974 he asked the A. N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies to conduct a survey of the development effort made in Musahari on behalf of the Gram Swaraj Movement. The findings of the Institute turned out to be no more flattering to the Sarvodayists than the Working Group report. The sociologists concluded that there still remained 'a wide gap between the ideas of the movement and the social realities . . . in the Gramdan villages'. The psychologist found that such changes as had occurred were 'far from being radical' and had failed in restructuring either the village economy or the minds of people: '*at best they have provided some relief to the system*'. The economist was even more categorical: 'The semi-feudal social formation got a rude shake-up in the wake of the poor peasant movement in Musahari The Sarvodaya Movement, and the intensification of the process of agricultural transformation from above . . . [have] once again tilted the power balance against the rural poor. Semi-Feudalism has staged a comeback.'⁵³

III Contemporary Agrarian Movements

For many years after Independence, the splits within splits in the Kisan Sabha, the death of Sahajanand, the euphoria generated by the

⁵¹ WGLR. (Emphasis added)

⁵² For the controversy relating to WGLR see A. C. Sen and Ranjit Gupta, 'Controversies over Rural Disparities: Some Unwarranted Impressions', *Mainstream*, 4 Aug. 1974; L. P. Singh, 'Sarvodaya Movement in Musahari', *ibid.*, 23 Feb. 1973; and India, Planning Commission, Land Reforms Division, *A Critique of the Rejoinder to the Field Trip Report of Working Group on Land Reforms (National Commission on Agriculture) on Agrarian Relations in Two Districts of Bihar* (Rapp. D. Bandopadhyay), New Delhi, July 1973.

⁵³ JOSES, pp. 3, 56, 84, 103. (Emphasis added)

enactment of agrarian reform legislation and the attempts by such leaders as Jaya Prakash Narayan to bring about 'Sarvodaya' (the welfare of all) and the relative quiet on the peasant front, led observers to believe that the agrarian problem in Bihar had been solved or was on the way to being solved. The rural scene was seen to be characterized by 'peasant apathy'.⁵⁴ Even when the quiet was shattered by peasant movements in the late 1960s and 1970s, it was seen as a sporadic phenomenon because the unrest was scattered, the Kisan Sabhas emasculated, the peasantry unorganized. There seemed to be no leaders. A historian of peasant organizations in Bihar, whom we have quoted earlier in this essay, went so far as to conclude that the movement 'had lost its mass support', and that 'political and economic conditions . . . restricted and ended the prospect for continued [peasant] activity'.⁵⁵ Events were to prove him wrong, as should be evident from what follows.

The Green Revolution to Prevent a Red One

Faced with the turbulence rural Bihar had exhibited in the 1930s and 1940s, the state intervened in a big way after Independence to promote new agricultural technology and provide for institutions aimed at establishing and maintaining harmony in the rural community. At the official level, this activity took place through the Agricultural Extension and Community Development schemes and, later, through special programmes and agencies like the Intensive Area Development Programme (IADP), Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA), Drought-Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Programme (MFAL), Rural Works Programme (RWP), Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE), Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Project (PIREP), Tribal Development Plans, and so on.

These schemes were not totally fruitless. Both agricultural production and productivity went up to an extent. There was a gradual, if limited, adoption of new agricultural technology. For instance, while in 1947 it was suggested that cultivators who did not use fertilizers on their fields when irrigation was provided should be compelled to do so,⁵⁶ by the 1970s there was a steady increase in the demand for

⁵⁴ Jannuzi, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ Hauser, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-3.

⁵⁶ *Searchlight*, 4 May 1947.

chemical fertilizers. (It was, indeed, the relative decline in the availability of such fertilizers in 1973-4 which, among other factors, led to dissatisfaction with the Congress Government among sections of the rich peasantry in south Bihar and provided the incentive for their support of Narayan's 'Total Revolution' movement.⁵⁷) Again, by 1973-4, 22.7 per cent of the total cropped area in Bihar was covered by high yield varieties (HYV) of seeds. As much as 20 per cent of the villages had been electrified and 104,000 pumping sets had been energized by 31 March 1975. The percentage of net area irrigated to net area sown in 1970 was already 28.3 for the whole state and 18.3, 60.1 and 7.9 for the north Bihar plains, south Bihar plains and the Chhotanagpur regions respectively. The total institutional credit increased phenomenally and the market for produce also expanded.⁵⁸ In sum, it seemed that agriculture in Bihar was progressing definitely, if slowly and perhaps even reluctantly, towards generalized commodity production under the benign guidance of the state. The agricultural sector as a whole seemed to be on the way to prosperity, as is evidenced by Table 2.

The administrative infrastructure, which was set up to bring about this prosperity in the agricultural sector by transforming its technological base (i.e. carrying out a Green Revolution), was founded solidly on the assumption that harmony reigned among all sections of the agrarian population. This approach was best typified by the Community Development Scheme which aimed at modernizing agriculture through extension services. These were to be provided at the Community Development Block level by bureaucrats and technocrats and at the lowest level by functionaries known as Gramsevaks (servants of the village) or Village Level Workers. These moves revolved around the belief that individuals, groups and classes in a village have common interests which are sufficiently strong to bind them together and that such conflict of interests as exist are easily reconcilable.⁵⁹ It was also generally accepted that developmental work

⁵⁷ Interviews with peasant participants in Jaya Prakash Narayan's meetings and processions, Aug.-Nov. 1974. Also *Yuva*, Oct. 1974.

⁵⁸ Bihar, Bihar State Planning Board, *Selected Plan Statistics* (Patna, 1976), pp. 127-53; 223-35; Hiranmay Dhar *et al.*, 'Bihar Agricultural Market Evaluation Project Reports', A. N. S. Institute (Patna, 1976-8).

⁵⁹ A. R. Desai, 'Community Development Projects: A Sociological Analysis', in A. R. Desai (ed.), *Rural Sociology in India*, 4th edn (Bombay, 1969), p. 615.

TABLE 1: Consumption of Chemical Fertilizers

<i>Year</i>	<i>Consumption of chemical fertilizers (tonnes)</i>
1970-1	99,000
1971-2	108,000
1972-3	118,000
1973-4	97,000
1974-5	117,000
1978-9	700,000 (Target)

Source: Reserve Bank of India, *Study Team Report on Cooperative Institutions in Bihar* (mimeo).

**TABLE 2: Indices of Agricultural Income
(1960-2 = 100)**

<i>Year</i>	<i>At current prices</i>	<i>At constant (1960-1) prices</i>
1965-6	177.78	101.31
1968-9	196.65	102.01
1969-70	196.69	95.80
1970-1	227.21	124.97
1971-2*	237.81	128.77
1972-3*	297.56	125.44

* Provisional Estimates.

Sources: Bihar, Bihar State Planning Board, *Selected Plan Statistics* (Patna, 1976), p. 110.

through the established traditional leaders in the villages, generally the more well-to-do peasants, would automatically benefit the whole community. Concentration on supplying modern inputs to the agricultural sector was an essential ingredient of the scheme and had the whole-hearted support of the World Bank.⁶⁰

Combined with this official attempt was the attempt made by voluntary organizations to bring about harmony in rural Bihar by

⁶⁰ Ernest Feder, 'McNamara's Little Green Revolution', *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, 3 Apr. 1976; André Gunder Frank, 'Reflections on Green, Red and White Revolutions in India', *EPW*, 20 Jan. 1973.

modernizing agriculture and making it more prosperous. Organizations like the Bharat Sevak Samaj set up *shramdan* (gift of labour) camps to help construct the massive flood-control and irrigation projects for the Kosi embankments and canal systems. The government backed these efforts and spent vast sums of money on them.⁶¹ Undaunted by the failure of *bhoodan* to solve the problems of rural Bihar caused by a disparity in landownership, the votaries of Sarvodaya went on to bigger schemes like *gramdan*, *Prakhand-dan*, *jilad-dan*⁶² and, finally, even *Bihar-dan*. The state supported these too with high praise and crores of rupees.⁶³

With all this progress brought about by official and non-official agencies it did seem in the 1950s and 1960s that the problems of rural unrest and agitation had been solved and harmony restored in rural Bihar. There seemed to be no cause for worry among the social and political elite. Independence had come: new avenues of increasing agricultural wealth had been opened up. It is true that zamindari was abolished, but generous compensation had been obtained. In any case, it had been possible for the zamindars to retain a fairly large amount of their land legally as *khud-kast jirat* (self-cultivated) or illegally through *benami* (fictitious) transfers. Although there was a land ceiling law in force, it had been possible for land to go 'underground' so that even the government had to admit in 1969 that 'No surplus has been taken over so far. The ceiling is not expected to yield much surplus.' As for legislation regulating tenancy, it was made 'completely ineffective in practice' by the ingenious device of changing tenants frequently enough 'to prevent them from acquiring rights in lands' and by ensuring that under-raiyats and share-croppers were omitted from the field *bujharat* records. Things were thus shaping up for the best in the best of all possible worlds and it was time to share out the loaves and fishes of office, which had been left behind by the British.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Interviews with participants in the *shramdan* camps, Purnea, November 1974. It was reported that enterprising individuals (like Lalit Narain Mishra) who were associated with the *shramdan* efforts made their political and other fortunes through such campaigns. Arvind N. Das, 'Partiality of a Total Revolution', *Mainstream*, Annual Number, 1977.

⁶² Jannuzi, op. cit., pp. 123-8.

⁶³ India, Planning Commission, *Third Five Year Plan* (Delhi, 1962), p. 376.

⁶⁴ The total amount of compensation paid in bonds and cash up to 1967-8 was Rs 212,888,000 and Rs 171,146,000 as 'Interim Payments'. Jannuzi, op. cit., pp. 35, 39, 44; and India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Research and Policy Division, 'The Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions', New Delhi, 1969. (Mimeo), Appendix: 'A Review of the Progress of Implementation of Land Reforms', Implementation Committee of the National Development Council, Aug. 1966.

Ironically, it was this very process of the distribution of the loaves and fishes which provoked the first agrarian unrest after Independence. It went on to totally discredit K. B. Sahay, the hero of the zamindari abolition,⁶⁵ and resulted in grave disquiet in rural Bihar. As during the very first phase of agrarian unrest in the 1920s and 1930s, on many occasions in the second phase too the issues agitating the peasantry were extra-economic ones such as those related to caste and social oppression. However, the difference between the two phases was that in the late 1960s and 1970s the participants came mainly from the lower orders of the peasantry—poor peasants, share-croppers and agricultural labourers belonging to the Harijan-Adivasi section—fighting not against absentee landlordism as in the zamindari period but against the new rich peasantry.⁶⁶ Zamindari abolition had turned the upper sections of the tenantry into exploiters. It was they who had to bear the brunt of the second agrarian awakening in twentieth-century Bihar.

By the middle of the 1960s 'the persistence of serious social and economic inequalities' and the widening gap between the relatively few affluent farmers and the large body of small landholders and agricultural workers was being increasingly noticed. This was so in spite of the increasing agricultural prosperity based on new technology, and perhaps because of it. It was officially admitted that the implemented programmes were 'more favourable to the larger owner-farmer than the smaller tenant-farmer', while the share-cropper and the landless labourer had been 'more often than not left out in the cold' with the result that 'disparities . . . widened accentuating social tensions'.⁶⁷ These social tensions started exhibiting themselves in a number of sporadic agrarian movements and the setting up of small organizations.

⁶⁵ By 1967, K. B. Sahay, who had become the Chief Minister, came to be known as a highly corrupt politician and was defeated in the elections of that year through the wide popularity of slogans like *Gali-gali Mein Shor Hai, K. B. Saalaa Chor Hai* ('Every street is reverberating with the cry: that bugger, K. B., is a thief'). A Commission of Enquiry headed by Mr Justice Iyer found him guilty of gross corruption. Bihar, *Report of the Iyer Commission* (Patna, 1972).

⁶⁶ Arun Sinha, 'Belchhi Revisited', *EPW*, 6 Aug. 1977; 'Kulak's Offensive', *Frontier*, 13 Aug. 1977; R. S. Joshi, 'Dark World of Harijans and Adivasis', *Link*, 5 June 1977.

⁶⁷ The extracts quoted in this paragraph are from India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 'The Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions'.

The Sathi Farms Struggle

The first major agrarian movement on an issue other than that of zamindari after Independence occurred, coincidentally, in Champaran district where Gandhi had started the first agrarian movement on behalf of the Congress. The Sathi struggle was, however, directed against the Congress.

The movement had started long before Independence and zamindari abolition—indeed during the tenure of the first Congress ministry in Bihar. That government had then appointed B. B. Varma, an important Congress leader and landholder of Champaran, as the first Indian Manager of the Bettiah Raj which was under the Court of Wards.⁶⁸ He held this office from 1939 to 1942, and again, under the second Congress ministry, from 1946 until 1950. During these years Varma settled large amounts of land with his relatives, important Congress leaders and influential outsiders like Birla and Nepani who wanted to set up sugarcane plantations to feed their factories.⁶⁹ This was in contravention of the principle which required the settlement of such lands in a Wards of Encumbered Estate to be made 'with local people as far as possible'.⁷⁰ Among the important persons with whom a substantial amount of land was settled were the then Excise Commissioner of Bihar, Ram Prasad Shahi and his brother, Ram Rekha Prasad Shahi who got about 350 acres of the Sathi farm land. They were related to Mahesh Prasad Sinha, K. B. Sahay's arch-rival in Bihar politics and a close lieutenant of the Chief Minister, Krishna Sinha. The settlement with the Shahis was made on 18 November 1946, ignoring the claims of local people some of whom were in actual possession of the land.⁷¹

Local peasants resisted the occupation of this land by the Shahis and a political scandal of considerable dimensions arose on the basis of this agrarian issue. Gandhi condemned the settlement. Patel was sent by the Congress Working Committee to investigate. The Bihar Congress appointed one Prajapati Mishra to act as arbitrator between

⁶⁸ Girish Mishra, *Agrarian Problems of Permanent Settlement: A Case Study of Champaran* (New Delhi, 1978), p. 297.

⁶⁹ *Indian Nation*, 31 May 1969; Ramnandan Mishra, *Kisanon ki Samsyayen* (Darbhanga, 1952) being a chapter of Ram Manohar Lohia *et al.*, *Champaran Farms Enquiry Commission Report* (unpublished).

⁷⁰ Bihar, Board of Revenue, Land Revenue Progs, no. 225-31B, Dec. 1947.

⁷¹ Indradeep Sinha, *Sakthi Ke Kisanon Ka Aitihāsik Sangbarsba* (Patna, 1969).

the peasants and the Shahis. Mishra, after a great deal of negotiations, announced his award that the Shahis should surrender 45 acres to the peasants. The latter, however, refused to accept the award and pointed out that Mishra himself had got Bettiah Raj lands settled in his own name in different part. of the estate.⁷² As agrarian tension mounted, the Socialist Party jumped into the fray and appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Dr Ram Manohar Lohia to investigate the whole question of land transfers in Champaran.⁷³ Sardar Patel too found a number of irregularities in the settlements made and, on his recommendation, the Congress Working Committee urged the Bihar Government to cancel the settlement with the Shahis and Mishra.⁷⁴ Mishra evaded the cancellation by creating a trust with himself as chairman and by transferring the land to it.⁷⁵ For cancellation of the settlement with the Shahis, the Government of Bihar enacted the Sathi Lands Restoration Act, 1950.⁷⁶ However, the Shahis went to court and the Act, declared null and void by the Supreme Court, was not implemented at all. Legislative action failing, the peasants were forced to agitate and are still doing so. Since then, the Shahis have sold their land to Sita Rajgarhia in 1962 but many other outsiders who got lands through the munificence of B. B. Varma still manage to retain them.⁷⁷

Through the 1950s and 1960s the Sathi Farms struggle remained almost the sole flame of organized peasant resistance in Bihar. However, in the late sixties the struggle spread to some of the lands held by other big estates like Shikarpur and the Sathi struggle, although somewhat relegated to the background by then, became a symbol of inspiration for peasant movements in other parts of Bihar.

The East Champaran Kisan Sabha

Strictly speaking, the East Champaran Kisan Sabha⁷⁸ based in Jharkia

⁷² Girish Mishra, op. cit. p. 298; *Searchlight*, 23 Mar. 1950.

⁷³ The report of Ram Manohar Lohia's commission was not published, but one chapter from it was published by a leading Socialist of Bihar, Ramnandan Mishra, op. cit.

⁷⁴ Bihar, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Progs*, 24-25 May 1950.

⁷⁵ Girish Mishra, op. cit., p. 298.

⁷⁶ The Act was aimed only at restoring the lands settled with the Shahis and not with others, many of whom were Congress leaders or businessmen. Deliberate or not, this loophole led the Supreme Court to describe the Act as discriminatory and strike it down.

⁷⁷ Girish Mishra, op. cit.

⁷⁸ R. N. Maharaj, 'Peasant Organisation in India: A Case Study of the Kisan Sabhas in Champaran', unpublished report prepared for the FAO, A. N. S. Institute (Patna, 1974).

village in Turkaulia Block is descended from the original Sabha founded by Sahajanand Saraswati, and in Champaran district it has inherited the legacy of the Sathi struggle. However, the present Kisan Sabha which is led by the CPI(M) is very different from the earliest organizations and can be said to have started only in the late 1960s. But within a decade it has increased its membership more than ten times in Jhakia and put up formidable resistance against the oppression of peasants by landlords.

Like many other peasant movements, the Jhakia Kisan Sabha too owes its origin to factors extraneous to the economy of the village. Its leader, Ram Ashray Singh, was involved in student agitation in 1967 in the wake of police firing on students in Patna. That agitation achieved its aim of driving the then Chief Minister, K. B. Sahay, from power, but the result did not satisfy Singh. On his return to his village he found that while one corrupt politician who had been instrumental in abolishing zamindari, was driven off the political stage, many petty tyrants who had benefited by zamindari abolition, were still ruling over Jhakia.⁷⁹ These were the landowners who had not only cornered a bulk of the land and other productive resources but also perpetrated different types of oppression on the rural poor. Beating up labourers, extracting *beth-begar* (forced unpaid labour), sexually exploiting poor women, abusing the labourers, arbitrating in disputes in order to levy large fines on them and thus pushing them into debt and bondage and of course, paying the workers less than the prescribed minimum wages — were common practice with landowners in Jhakia.

Into this situation stepped Ram Ashray Singh, himself a scion of the Bhumihar landowners, a veritable counter-elite. Cautiously and over a long period, he first fraternized with the poor peasants so as to overcome the suspicion aroused by the fact of his class origin. Often it was the landlords themselves who by their oppressive conduct made the peasants angry. Ram Ashray Singh utilized all such opportunities to infuse courage into the peasants. As a tactical measure, the very first issues he took up were related to social oppression and not economic exploitation. The poor were persuaded, initially, to offer 'passive resistance' to landlords by denying them the right to arbitrate in intracommunity disputes, by refusing to leave their seats when they approached, by withholding all traditional gestures of respect from them. Peasant youths were advised to wear shoes in the landlords' presence. Since seasonal migration to Assam is an annual

⁷⁹ Interview with Ram Ashray Singh, Semra, 1 May 1974.

feature in the lives of the village poor, many pairs of shoes left unused otherwise, were transformed into 'weapons' against landlords.⁸⁰

Once 'passive resistance' of this kind caught on, active resistance to the landlords' authority was soon to follow. They were to be mocked, addressed in disparaging terms and even occasionally slapped in public.⁸¹ If the landlords had recourse to abuse or assault, they were paid back in their own coin. As a result of all this there were numerous clashes between the increasingly militant peasants and the landlords, who were more and more bewildered and angry at the challenge to their well-established and unquestioned power. The landlords started the attack and called in the police to help them. Against this combined assault, women and children were mobilized to offer resistance. Several peasants and their leaders, including Ram Ashray Singh, were arrested, but were released on bail on the intervention of the local CPI(M). The heroes' welcome which the peasants received on their return from jail further added to the morale of the rural poor in Jharkia.

It was only after this preparatory work that economic issues were taken up. The first of these was the question of agricultural labourers' wages; the method of agitation adopted for this purpose was a strike. During this movement, however, care was taken to exempt the middle peasants. Also when rich peasants were found to be going to their fields to harvest the crops, detachments of workers went to render them free help. Only the landlords who would not do any work at all, were thus totally isolated and forced to raise wage rates from 6 *katchi seers* to 8 *katchi seers*.⁸² Although this apparently large increase still left the wages at a level lower than the minimum prescribed by the government, the victory of the agricultural labourers proved to be a tremendous encouragement for poor peasants in the whole region and the Kisan Sabha started not only expanding its area of activity but also began to consolidate its organization on the basis of participatory democracy.⁸³ Inevitably there was repression by the landlords and the state. Hundreds of cases were filed against the

⁸⁰ R. N. Maharaj, *op. cit.*

⁸¹ Interview with Uma Shankar Shukla, Motihari, 7 May 1974.

⁸² Arvind N. Das *et al.*, 'The Role of Rural Organisations in Involving the Poor in Development in Bihar': Report prepared for the FAO, Public Enterprises Centre for Continuing Education (New Delhi, 1978), pp. 60-6.

⁸³ R. N. Maharaj, *op. cit.* Today the Kisan Sabha covers almost the whole of East Champaran district, though the 'headquarters' is still in Jharkia.

Sabha activists and many poor peasants had to leave their villages in order to evade warrants of arrest. However, this did little harm to the Sabha and, in fact, helped it to increase its organizational solidarity not only within its own ranks but even with other organizations struggling over similar issues. During the Emergency (1975-7), a Samyukta Krishak Mazdoor Sangharsha Morcha (Joint Peasant-Worker Struggle Front) of the Sabha and activists close to the CPI(ML) effectively met repression and protected the gains of the rural poor.⁸⁴

What has been a set-back to the Kisan Sabha in East Champaran, however, is the ambivalence of its political leadership towards parliamentary institutions. Unlike Sahajanand,⁸⁵ the Champaran Kisan Sabha leaders still had hopes of achieving a 'judicious mix of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activities' in their struggle. Hence, in 1977, the CPI(M) leadership decided to put up its most charismatic and popular activist Ram Ashray Singh as a candidate for election first, in March, to Parliament and then, in June, to the Assembly. During the electoral campaign in March the landlords launched a virulent attack on and even shot at Ram Ashray Singh, injuring him severely, so that in spite of his popularity, he lost. But the party leadership persisted. In June, Ram Ashray Singh was elected to the Assembly where he became Deputy Leader of the CPI(M) legislative group of four members. The CPI(M) ignored its own inner-party debate on 'Vote and Revolution' and thus managed both to 'legitimize' the Jharkia movement and isolate it somewhat from the peasants. Thus, when in 1977 a peasant leader, Gambhira Sah, was murdered by landlords⁸⁶ and the police, and they assassinated several other peasants, forced the population of an entire Harijan village to flee for their lives and committed many other atrocities in Chhauradano

⁸⁴ Interviews with peasants, Darpa-Chhauradano, East Champaran 21-23 Sept. 1977.

⁸⁵ After Independence, Sahajanand had declared that the Kisan Sabha would not be involved in electoral politics as that would result in 'multiplying corruption and misuse of power' gained through 'parliamentary shadow fights'. *Searchlight*, 18 May 1949. Within the Bihar CPI (M) itself, there was a serious debate on 'Vote and Revolution' leading to the expulsion of the popular trade union leader A. K. Roy from the party which decided to stick to the line of electoral politics. Correspondence between A. K. Roy and Siabar Sharan Shrivastava, Secretary, Bihar State Committee of the CPI (M), June-July 1971. Unpublished, made available.

⁸⁶ Arun Sinha, 'Murder of a Peasant Leader', *EPW*, 30 June 1977.

Block of Champaran district,⁸⁷ Ram Ashray Singh visited the area in his capacity as an M.L.A. and was visibly torn between anger at what he saw and the constraints of the legislative establishment to which he belonged.⁸⁸

Today, organized peasant movements of the Jharkia Kisan Sabha type seem to have reached a critical point where decisions have to be taken about its paths and goals. There is a growing disillusionment generated by the fact that even such long-standing and militant organizations as the Kisan Sabha led by the CPI in Madhubani have benefited only the middle peasants and larger share-croppers and done little to tackle the problems of agricultural labourers.⁸⁹ As against this there has been, since the late 1960s, a strong wave of spontaneous, sporadic and largely unorganized agrarian movements of the poor and landless peasants in Bihar.⁹⁰ At times these have come under some sort of 'political' or 'ideological' guidance of one faction or the other of the CPI(ML) as in Musahari (Muzaffarpur), Purnea and Bhojpur. But, by and large, the current phase of peasant unrest has been without political affiliation in terms of parties and erupted on local issues which may or may not be generally applicable to all the poor peasantry in the whole state. However, what is common to all such movements is the very severe repression with which these have been met both by the landlords and the state.⁹¹ It will be sufficient for our purpose here to take up only three examples of the numerous peasant upheavals of this kind.

⁸⁷ Arvind N. Das, 'Harijans are for killing', *Filhaal*, 10 Jan. 1978.

⁸⁸ Visit to Darpa-Chhauradano with Ram Ashray Singh, 21-23 Sept. 1977.

⁸⁹ Ganganath Thakur, 'Peasant Movement in Madhubani', *National Labour Institute Bulletin* (December 1977).

⁹⁰ 'Proceedings of the seminar on Agrarian Movements in Bihar' (unpublished), A. N. S. Institute (Dec. 1977); Sachchidanand *et al.*, 'Sarvodaya and Development', *JOSES*; Anil Thate, *Purarnyatil Badvanal* (Forest Fire in Purnea) (Purnea, 1972); Hiranmay Dhar *et al.*, 'Bhojpur: A Tale of Terror', *Times of India*, 26 June 1977.

⁹¹ 'Chawri Kand ke Badd', *Filhaal*, 5 Aug. 1973; 'Dharampura Hatyakand ki Rapat', *Prakriya*, 4 Nov. 1977; Arun Sinha, 'The Twenty-Point Toll', *Times of India*, 26 June 1977; Hiranmay Dhar, 'Bihar ke Gaonon Mein Himsa', *Samayik Varta*, 16 Aug. 1977; 'Varga Sangharsha: Belchi, Pathadda', *Dinmaan*, 19 June and 24 July 1977; 'Madhuman: Malik ke Paas Bandukwa Haieye Hai', *Dinmaan*, 13 May 1977; 'Gahlaur Kand ki Report', *Filhaal*, 5 Sept. 1973; Tulsī Rao, 'Vaidiki Himsa Himsa Na Bhavati', *Filhaal*, 5 Jan. 1972; etc.

The Land Grab Movement

While the agitations of the tenants in the 1930s and 1940s and their partial successes had whetted the hunger of the poorer peasantry for land ownership, neither the legislative-administrative measures taken up after Independence nor the voluntary movements like *bhoodan* achieved much success in satisfying that hunger.⁹² The Bihar Government took only some hesitant steps towards the enactment of a land ceiling legislation. A Bihar Agricultural Lands (Ceiling and Management) Bill, 1955, was introduced in the legislature by Sahay after much feuding within the ruling Congress Party. It was referred to a Select Committee which suggested watering down some of the more important provisions regarding the ceiling area. But even that revised draft was put into cold storage. The government conveniently waited till 1961 to put forth a new version of the original ceilings bill—a version with sufficient loopholes to satisfy the most militant opponent of the earlier draft legislation.⁹³ Fully acceptable to the latter, the new ceilings bill, the Bihar Land Reforms (Fixation of Ceiling Area and Acquisition of Surplus Land) Act, 1961, was enacted into law without much debate.

⁹² The position with regard to the distribution of land under Bhoodan-Sarvodaya movement in Bihar and India was as follows until 1969.

Region	Land received (acres)	Land distributed (acres)	Land rejected (acres)
Bihar	2,121,462	331,842	1,067,006
India	4,264,096	1,190,718	1,730,146

Region	Land to be distributed (acres)	Gramdan villages (nos)
Bihar	722,614	13,198
India	1,343,232	37,775

Source: India, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation, *Report of the National Commission on Labour, 1969*, Ch. 28, pp. 400–9.

⁹³ Jannuzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 77; Bihar, *Report of the Select Committee on the Bihar Agricultural Lands (Ceiling and Management) Bill, 1955* (Patna, 1955).

Even with this legislation, the government scarcely seemed to be in a hurry to implement it. It was noted in 1964 that by then no staff senior to the grade of 'one upper-division clerk for each district headquarters and one lower-division clerk for each sub-divisional headquarters' had been appointed for this purpose.⁹⁴ Sometime later, the authorities began to print notices (required by the Act) asking each landholder in the state to submit returns relating to lands in his possession, but 'there is no evidence to suggest that these notices were actually issued until the summer of 1970'.⁹⁵ Such being the government's attitude, the landholders not only 'cleverly devised methods of evading the ceiling legislation', but also 'liberally interpreted the liberal exemptions granted under the legislation'. On the other hand, the Act, by allowing the landholder to resume lands from his tenants for 'personal cultivation', permitted the eviction of thousands of under-raiyats or sub-tenants from lands which they had tilled for many years, sometimes for generations, without being accorded occupancy raiyat status. The landholder could select from his best lands the area he wished to retain within his ceiling, evict the tenants on those lands, reducing them in the process to the status of landless agricultural labourers, and give up, if at all, poor quality lands in excess of the ceiling. No wonder that by 1969 the 'eviction of tenants and share-croppers following resumption of lands for direct cultivation' had appreciably increased.⁹⁶ A new variant of the *bakasht* issue had been created by the Act. Left without implementation it had, by 1974, simply 'permitted those who wish[ed] to circumvent the Act's provisions to do so, and with time to spare . . . helped to engender a climate of apprehension in the countryside among those under-raiyats who fear[ed] eviction . . . [and] raised expectations among the landless'.⁹⁷

It was on the basis of such expectations that in the late 1960s, resentment built up among the evicted tenants and the landless labourers in general and culminated in the so-called Land Grab Movement of 1970. The outburst of 1970 was again caused by many factors outside the immediate universe of the peasants' economic

⁹⁴ India, Planning Commission, *Implementation of Land Reforms: A Review by the Land Reforms Implementation Committee of the National Development Council* (New Delhi, 1966).

⁹⁵ Jannuzi, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁹⁶ India, Ministry of Labour, etc., *Report of the National Commission on Labour*.

⁹⁷ Jannuzi, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

existence. The morale and fighting spirit of the Bihari peasant had been aroused not only by the example of the widespread peasant movement then raging in the neighbouring state of West Bengal, but the message of peasant struggle in Bihar itself in places such as Musahari and Surajgarha (Monghyr) was being spread in the countryside by itinerant middle-class, mainly student, revolutionary activists and through pamphlets, folk songs and aphorisms. On the other hand, the fall of the Congress Government in 1967 and its replacement by a United Front which included a large number of the representatives of the politically excluded 'Backward Castes'—a symbolic representation the importance of which did not fail to register on the Scheduled Castes and Tribes⁹⁸—also demolished the image of the immutable state and made the peasant look on it with a little less awe.

The new government, which included such populist parties as the CPI, Socialist, Jharkhand, etc. (albeit along with the Jan Sangh and the Ramgarh Raja's Janta Party), acted, as Jannuzi has observed, out of an 'instinct for self-preservation'. It feared that the mass of the rural population, especially the 'majority of economically depressed, backward and scheduled castes', would be mobilized and led by dissident politicians prepared to exploit land hunger and other local issues. So it made 'a rather desperate attempt to anticipate peasant demands by demonstrating that lawful changes in the agrarian structure might (still) be effected by a genuinely responsive government before unlawful [*sic*] changes became a prevalent and accepted mode of addressing agrarian problems in Bihar'.⁹⁹ A fresh spate of land reform legislation was enacted. The 'Tata Zamindari' was finally abolished. The tenants' position was secured in law by curtailing the process of legislation. The right of the landless to public common—*gairmazarua aam*—lands was recognized. A measure was enacted to provide homestead lands to the rural poor.¹⁰⁰ And so on. At the same

⁹⁸ Nirmal Sengupta, 'An Analysis of the Membership of the Bihar Legislative Assembly', Seminar Paper, A. N. S. Institute (Patna, 1972). More than one ministry formed in the period was headed by Bhola Paswan Shastri, a harijan leader from Purnea and almost all ministries included at least a few harijans and *adivasis*.

⁹⁹ Jannuzi, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

¹⁰⁰ For these measures see *The Bihar Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1970* (Patna, 1970); *The Bihar Tenancy (Amendment) Act, 1970* (*ibid.*); *The Bihar Public Land Encroachment (Amendment) Ordinance, 1970* (*ibid.*); *The Bihar Privileged Persons Homestead Tenancy (Amendment) Act, 1970* (*ibid.*).

time, a pléthora of circulars re-affirmed the government's commitment to 'the speedy implementation of land reforms', because delay in that respect 'often leads to agrarian unrest'.¹⁰¹ But perhaps it was too late in the day to meet the oncoming tide of peasant discontent by erecting a barrage of paper legislation and semi-official letters.

By the middle of 1970, the peasants were already moving on to lands, forcibly occupying them, harvesting the *rabi* crops and sowing the *kharif* seeds. This movement was strongest in the Purnea, Muzaffarpur and Monghyr districts. Some of it was done, as the 'Naxalites' admitted, under their guidance;¹⁰² more was credited to them by increasingly hysterical reports in the landlords' newspapers such as the *Indian Nation*.¹⁰³ 'Rumours began circulating with increased velocity. Large landholders converged on Patna and gathered in each other's town houses, commiserating with one another and asking, "What can we do?" "How can we protect our interests?" "From whom can we draw support?" As if in response, political parties of the right, opposed to the land-grab movement, began issuing statements condemning those who would agitate the peasants, end rural tranquillity, and create a dangerous law and order situation in the state as a whole'.¹⁰⁴ The Jan Sangh, one of whose activists, a ruthless landlord, had been killed in Musahari on 26 July 1970, was among the first to denounce the land-grab.¹⁰⁵ The Bharatiya Kranti Dal (forerunner of the Bharatiya Lok Dal), then led in Bihar by K. B. Sahay's political rival Mahamaya Prasad, issued statements labelling the movement 'unconstitutional', 'unjust', and, for good measure, even 'anti-national'. And Sahay himself in his role as president of the Congress (Organization) came out against the movement which, he predicted, 'would lead only to violence and anarchy and would not result in the landless receiving land'. For he argued, there was not enough land for all those who wanted it. As the issue of violence and non-violence had been raised and as one of the landlords killed in Musahari was said to have been a votary of Sarvodaya, the former

¹⁰¹ Bihar, Revenue Department, D. O. No. 5LR-LA-224/70-5667-L.R., Patna, dated 1 July 1970; D. O. No. 5LR-LA/224/70-6016-LR, Patna, dated 9 July 1970.

¹⁰² *Liberation*, July-Aug. 1970; *Janyuddha*, Aug. 1970.

¹⁰³ The landlords' papers in Bihar during the period are replete with stories of the 'Naxalite menace', e.g. *Indian Nation*, 1-20 Aug. 1970, *passim*.

¹⁰⁴ Jannuzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-2. Jannuzi was present in one such meeting and gives an eye-witness account.

¹⁰⁵ *Indian Nation*, 31 July 1970.

Kisan leader, Jaya Prakash Narayan, jumped into the fray and set up camp in Musahari to meet the threat posed by the rising of the poor peasants. On its part, the Bihar Government put a ban on weapons being carried in public and instructed all District Magistrates to maintain law and order strictly.¹⁰⁶

However, none of these measures of open opposition seemed to hold the peasants back. As they kept moving to occupy more and more lands from which they had been evicted and those still held by their owners in excess of the legally prescribed ceiling, the government was forced to publish the names of 125 of the largest landholders in the state. Many of these were ex-zamindars and substantial raiyats who still retained estates comprising hundreds, even thousands, of acres. Among the major estates named were those of Kursela in Purnea, Dumraon Raj in Shahabad, Darbhanga Raj in Darbhanga, Hathwa Raj in Saran and Ramgarh Raj in Hazaribagh. At the same time, the government specified that the lands of all who had been named would immediately be brought within the purview of the Ceiling Act of 1961, and their cases disposed of 'summarily'. Simultaneously, it announced that notices under the Ceiling Act were being served on 'at least five big farmers in each of 587 blocks in the State'. Accordingly, the Sub-Divisional Officer of Begusarai, an area of endemic agrarian unrest since the days of Karyanand Sharma in the 1930s, announced publicly that the surplus lands of five landlords in each of the eleven blocks within his jurisdiction would be seized and distributed among the landless.¹⁰⁷ Through this masterly stroke, the government was able somewhat to narrow down the scope of the Land Grab Movement. But even that would perhaps not have succeeded in emasculating it had it not been for the part played by the 'left' parties, the Praja Socialist Party (PSP), the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) and the Communist Party of India (CPI), who, by joining the movement at this stage, transformed it from being a real attack by the peasantry on the iniquitous land structure of Bihar to being mere symbolic opposition. By formalizing the movement, the PSP, SSP and CPI succeeded in killing it.

The PSP, SSP and CPI decided to launch a formal national land-

¹⁰⁶ Jannuzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 152, 153. Also *Indian Nation*, 31 July 1970.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 19 July 1970.

grab movement from 9 to 15 August 1970.¹⁰⁸ Even though these parties were not able to keep their cadres and the peasants in check until the appointed day of action and incidents occurred even before that in places like Sathi in Champaran and Darbhanga where landlords had forcibly evicted share-croppers, demolished the homes of landless peasants, illegally occupied fallow government lands and generally abused the peasantry,¹⁰⁹ the 'left' parties succeeded in the main in restricting both the scope and character of the movement. More attention was focused on *gairmazarua aam* lands than on 'private' lands. The CPI stated openly that their objectives were limited and symbolic: 'Our attention was focussed on no more than 15 big landholders, such as Ramgarh, Darbhanga, Hathwa, Dumraon and Kursela.'¹¹⁰ The Socialists were more interested in making public the lands secretly held by Congressmen such as Jagjivan Ram in Ranchi and wherever they set out to 'liberate' such land, they did so with a great deal of pomp and ceremony with journalists in full attendance.¹¹¹ Finally, on 18 August 1970, the leading 'left' party, CPI, announced that it had decided to withdraw from the land-grab agitation and would decide on its future course of action after assessing the Bihar Government's performance in fulfilling agrarian reform implementation targets.¹¹² The Socialists' movement came to an announced end.

By thus ceremonially sponsoring a popular movement and formalizing it, the 'left' parties helped to expose it prematurely to official violence and thereby brought it to an end as hundreds of peasants,

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Indradeep Sinha, 4-5 Sept. 1978. In the meantime, landlords formed and consolidated their own organizations to fight the threat. *Indian Nation*, 17 July 1970, reported that a 'Kisan Sabha' [*sic*] had been established in Purnea district to resist the land-grab movement. R. N. Maharaj, *op. cit.*, found the existence of a similar Jan Sangh-led Krishak Sabha in Champaran. In other parts of the states too formal and informal organizations of landholders were formed in 1970. Some continue to date and are alleged to possess a large number of fire-arms as reported by peasants in the course of interviews with them in Banmankhi, Tulkaulia, Sahar, Masaurhi and many other parts of Bihar.

¹⁰⁹ *Indian Nation*, 20 July 1970. Interview with Bhogendra Jha, Patna, 20 Dec. 1977.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Indradeep Sinha.

¹¹¹ *Indian Nation*, 11 Aug. 1970. Interview with Ram Shanran Joshi, journalist-participant in the SSP's Land Grab at Ajhukopa village in Purnea District, Purnea, 5 May 1977. Also, Anil Thate, *op. cit.*

¹¹² Jannuzi, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

many belonging to the CPI, SSP and PSP, were arrested all over Bihar.¹¹³ The so-called 'politicization' of the movement also served as a pretext for its repression in the name of fighting 'Naxalism'.

Masaurhi, 1970-5

While movements like the 'Land Grab' were resisted by landowners and the state both by legislative reform and repression and manipulated by political parties of the 'left' by 'formalising ceremonies', all movements of the poor and landless peasants in Bihar have been faced since 1970 with more direct opposition by the vested interests.¹¹⁴ The experience of the Masaurhi-Punpun area in Patna district is a case in point. Until 1970 Madhuban village in Dhanarua Block of Patna district contained nine square miles of forest land. In that year, the government got the land cleared by local landless harijan labourers with the avowed aim of settling them there. However, once the land was made fit for cultivation, the Yadav rich peasants of the area occupied it and started terrorizing the harijan labourers, beating them up, maiming them and raping their women folk.¹¹⁵ This situation continued for several years but slowly a resistance to oppression built up among the harijans. On 9 May 1975 three Yadav landowners from the neighbouring Patharhat village were killed. After that the village was declared 'Naxalite-infested' by the government, a police party was posted there and 18 harijan labourers were arrested.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *Indian Nation*, 10-17 Aug. 1970, *passim*. Also, Paul R. Brass, 'Radical Parties of the Left in Bihar: A Comparison of the SSP and the CPI' in Brass and M. Franda (eds), *Radical Politics in South Asia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974).

¹¹⁴ In 1971-2, there were several instances of sporadic agrarian movements which were suppressed. Although few of the incidents were big enough to receive much publicity, the Bihar newspapers were nevertheless full of reports on 'Land Grabbing', 'Crop-Looting', etc., by the landless and beatings, killings and incendiarism on the part of the landlords. (See *Indian Nation*, 1971-2, *passim*.) Such small-scale incidents would be punctuated occasionally by big and dramatic ones such as those at Rupaspur-Chandwa (Purnea) where fourteen *adivasi* labourers were burnt to death by landowners led by Laxmi Narayan Suddhansu, a former Speaker of the Bihar Legislative Assembly. Tulsī Rao, 'Vaidiki Himsa Himsa Na Bhavati', *Filhaal*, 5 Jan. 1972.

¹¹⁵ Rape has been a fairly common mode of oppression on the rural poor in Bihar. Bihar Legislative Assembly Secretariat, *Report of the Gahlor Inquiry Committee* (Chairman: Hari Nath Mishra, Speaker Bihar Legislative Assembly), (Patna, 1973). Also, interview with Pradhan H. Prasad, *New York Times*, 5 Oct. 1973.

¹¹⁶ Arun Ranjan, 'Madhuban: Malik Ke Paas Bandukwa Haiye Hai', *Dinmaan*, 13-19 May 1977.

The entire population of a nearby village, Deokuli, had a dispute with another village, Belabarah, in 1972 over an irrigation *bundh* (dam). The villagers of Deokuli got together and raised money for a legal battle against those of Belabarah in the courts. The funds thus raised were allegedly defalcated by a landowner belonging to the Awadhia Kurmi caste, who also oppressed the harijans in many ways. When one of his ploughmen fell ill during the paddy transplantation season in 1974, he took away the land traditionally given to such 'attached' labourers. On 16 March 1975 a harijan boy, passing through the part of the village where Awadhias live, was surrounded by landowners and beaten to death. On 7 May 1975 more than a dozen young Awadhia landowners entered the Musahar (harijan) *tola* and raped a number of women. When the harijans finally resisted such atrocities, they were labelled 'Naxalites'.¹¹⁷

Nema village of Punpun Block in Patna district had been a scene of struggle by the landless and poor peasants—mostly harijans—for their right to minimum wages prescribed by the government and homestead lands to which they were officially entitled.¹¹⁸ This struggle had been going on since 1967 and ever since then armed police had been posted in the village. But the presence of the guardians of law and order did not deter landowners from oppressing the harijans. The raping of harijan women was a common occurrence and in this sport the landowners were joined by the personnel of the police camp. Rape is said to have become so widespread that it has become difficult to find husbands for the girls from this village.¹¹⁹

Finally, in 1975 some mild resistance was put up by the harijans. One of them, Virda Musahar, organized the landless in a few villages and they demanded payment of the prescribed minimum wages. At the same time they refused to let their womenfolk go to the landowners' houses for menial jobs and the men refused to do *begar*. The landowners and the state immediately cracked down on them. The Border Security Force (BSF), Bihar Military Police (BMP), and the Central Reserve Police (CRP) were pressed into action and a wireless link was established with Patna. Eight harijans were arrested in

¹¹⁷ Arvind N. Das, 'Murder to Landlords' Order', *EPW*, 10:24 (14 June 1975).

¹¹⁸ Interviews with peasants, Punpun, 1-3 June 1975. For obvious reasons, many peasants prefer to remain anonymous.

¹¹⁹ Sahajanand describes a similar situation in Masaurha in the 1920s. Sahajanand, *Mera Jeewan Sangharsha* (Patna, 1952), p. 318.

Shahbajpur village on false charges, even though their Bhumihar landlords themselves were ready to provide alibis. Fifty-five so-called 'Naxalites' were arrested in Punpun.¹²⁰ Police and para-military forces patrolled the area creating a general climate of terror. The situation thus became potentially explosive. When, inevitably, the explosion occurred, it was reported thus in the pro-landlord newspaper, the *Indian Nation* itself:

The *Karo ya Maro* (do or die) task force of the BMP set up in Masaurhi by the senior SP, was on [its] usual beat in plain dress when, in the morning, they had a desire to have chicken for their lunch that day. They were camping in village Neyamatpur from which this [Musahari, i.e. harijan] *tola* is just a furlong away. They found quite a good number of chicken in the Musahari and approached some of the residents but a wordy duel ensued over the price of the commodity which started more playing [*sic*] of tempers as it went on.

Soon someone from a nearby house came out who was stated to be an outsider and he started arguing on behalf of the local Musahars. This led to further wordy duel and when the BMP jawans threatened the man with their revolvers, they were greeted with a cracker from inside a house. The cracker hit a Neem tree which got partially burnt and the BMP jawans, alarmed at this sudden development, retreated to a nearby field which is about two meters from Musahari den and took their positions. Consequently, a regular cross-fire was started which continued till seven in the evening.

In the meantime a local policeman managed to slip down to Masaurhi P.S. to ask for reinforcements. The stationed CRP jawans were ordered to march...and they reached the village at about 4 p.m. By the time the CRP platoon at Kekhuli was also ordered to march through a wireless message and before sunset about 300 CRP men encircled the battle-zone which covered about 20 thatched houses. But the villagers were shocked to behold the modus operandi of the CRP when in a bid to smoke 18 Naxalites out of one house the jawans, they alleged, put all houses of the *tola* on fire after three of their colleagues were hit by the extremists' bullets. Then they scaled the roofs of the adjacent houses and opened LMG (light machine gun) assault. The extremists, who by then were taking shelter inside the three-roomed house of Mohun Musahar, were cut down by a hail of bullets one by one.

When that house was also engulfed by blazing fire as they came out, their hands raised in a token of surrender almost naked, they were all shot down from point blank range which left almost all of their corpses

¹²⁰ Bajrang Singh, 'Masaurhi Ka Hatyakand', *Dinmaan*, June 1975.

disfigured. . . . The very look of the village, however, does not signify that it had served as a base to the Naxalites. The over-enthusiastic police officers, who were camping at Neyamatpur, took me to a long ditch covered by straws and said that the tunnel was meant for hiding Naxalites. But the ditch appeared to be a place meant for dumping garbage . . .

The entire village is free from posters of Naxalites although police claim to have recovered a large number of Naxal literature from here . . .¹²¹

The Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee's Vice-President, Mungeri Lal, who visited the area after the incident with a team of other harijan and 'Backward Caste' Congressmen (and was 'gheraoed' by the landowners and asked to go away), wondered how 'Naxalite' literature had survived a fire which had burnt even the butts of rifles.¹²²

The events of Masaurhi were not significant because 'Naxalite' literature was claimed to have been recovered from the burnt-down huts of harijans. Nor, by any means, were the struggles of the poor peasants in Masaurhi-Taregna belt in any way comparable with the Telengana movement as was sought to be made out by a Deputy Inspector General of Police.¹²³ Masaurhi's significance lay in the fact that the landowners and the state had demonstrated that any attempts by the poor peasants to put up resistance, and for that matter, any popular movement, would be ruthlessly crushed. In less than three weeks after the events at Masaurhi, Emergency was declared throughout the country and popular resistance to oppression seemed to have been checked for a while. The exploitation, oppression and even murder of landless agricultural workers, however, continued during the Emergency and reached its peak after the elections in 1977. What happened since then at Belchchi, Pathhadda, Chhauradano, Bishrampur, etc., is too recent to need recapitulation here, but the import of these seems to be that the attempts of the poor peasantry in Bihar to organize itself and affirm its legal rights have been preempted by repression on the part of the landowners. The ability of

¹²¹ *Indian Nation*, 7 June 1975.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ B. N. Sinha, DIG (Naxalite), 'From Telengana to Taregna', *Searchlight*, 12 June 1975. In 1977, as a result of the peasant movement, the government had to concede to the demands of the landless in Madhuban and the reclaimed land was distributed among them. Thus, the struggle at Masaurhi achieved partial success but 'perhaps the price paid for the success was very heavy'. Arun Ranjan, 'Madhuban', *Dinmaan*, 13-19 May 1977.

the poor peasants to resist seems to have been checked, at least for some time, and agrarian unrest appears to have become 'history' in most parts of Bihar except in areas like Bhojpur where the poor are still struggling and agrarian unrest is still current.

Bhojpur

Bhojpur comprises the old district of Shahabad, with its headquarters at Arrah, and includes within it the old zamindari areas of Jagdishpur, Dumraon, etc. It has been a scene of endemic agrarian unrest which has, however, undergone radical transformation in terms of its leadership and character. During the great Indian Mutiny of 1857, the peasantry of Bhojpur was led into revolt by the impoverished zamindar of Jagdishpur, Babu Kunwar Singh, his brother, Babu Amar Singh and their followers, Harkishan Singh, Nishan Singh and others. Although the revolt was successfully crushed by the British, the subsequent policy of the government was aimed both at administrative efficiency and agricultural development in order to prevent peasant turbulence. Hence, Bhojpur became the first area in Bihar where the administration was sought to be systematized by the introduction of such measures as the Indian Penal Code, and its agriculture 'modernized' through the construction of the Sone Canal System in the late nineteenth century.¹²⁴ Thanks to the latter, agriculture was considerably commercialized and was made profitable. However, the continuing concentration of land in the hands of a very few big Rajput-Bhumihar landlords forced all agrarian development in the area into a *junker* model of 'capitalism from above'. Nevertheless, the agricultural prosperity of the region provided vast rental incomes to the zamindars¹²⁵ and led at the same time to the economic stability of a larger section of the population. Ironically, the latter became increasingly anti-British, and made the national movement in these parts more militant and violent than elsewhere in Bihar.¹²⁶ Thus, the second peasant upsurge, also nationalist in character, was led by the emergent rich peasantry of the area.

¹²⁴ See John Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian* (London, 1961) and Kalyan Mukherjee *et al.*, 'Bhojpur: A Socio-economic Survey' (unpublished report), National Labour Institute (New Delhi, 1978).

¹²⁵ The rental income of Dumraon estate, for instance, was so large that litigation concerning it provided a large income for several years to such highly paid lawyers as Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das, Rajendra Prasad, Sachidanand Sinha, etc. Anugrah Narain Sinha, *Mere Sansmaran* (Patna, 1961).

¹²⁶ Peter Robb, 'Officials and Non-Officials as Leaders in Popular Agitations:

The commercialization of agriculture led to two other consequences. First, along with the emergence of the *junker* phenomenon, there was also a tendency towards the development of 'capitalism from below' by tenant-cultivators belonging largely to the so-called 'Backward Castes'. These growing kulak elements joined the anti-zamindari struggle led by the Bihar Kisan Sabha and ran their own social-reform and agrarian-change lobby called the Triveni Sangh in the 1930s and 1940s.¹²⁷ Secondly, there was also an increasing differentiation among the peasantry and depeasantization at the lowest levels. Some of those peasants who had been rendered landless were absorbed into the agricultural sector itself as 'attached' and free wage labourers, while others were forced into an external process of proletarianization by having to look for subsistence outside Bhojpur. The 'coolie proletariat' of Calcutta even today is composed largely of such migrant workers from Bhojpur, and the armed forces have also drawn large numbers from the region. At the economic level this has led to the phenomenon of a 'money-order economy' whereby remittances from such workers provide not only a substantial segment of the state income of Bihar but also some security to the dependents of these workers who constitute the poor and landless peasantry in the villages of Bhojpur. At the socio-cultural level, this has led to a dislocation of family life (as articulated, for instance, through Bhikhari Thakur's *bidesia* folk songs), an influx of arms into the area and a consequent rashness expressed in the saying '*Arrah zila ghar ba, kone baat ke dar baa*' ('My home is in Arrah district; what am I afraid of!').¹²⁸ The third phase of peasant unrest in Bhojpur, once again with a heavy nationalist content, was led by the upper middle

Shahabad 1917 and Other Conspiracies', in B. N. Pandey (ed.), *Leadership in South Asia* (Delhi, 1977). Also, G. McDonald, 'Unity on Trial: Congress in Bihar 1929-39', in D. A. Low (ed.) *Congress and the Raj* (London, 1977).

¹²⁷ Kalyan Mukherjee, *op. cit.*

¹²⁸ Kalyan Mukherjee and Manju Kala, 'Bhojpur: The Long War', *Mainstream*, 16:45-6 (July 1978); P. P. Ghosh, 'Input-Output Table for Bihar' (unpublished report), A. N. S. Institute (Patna 1974). The large number of legal and illegal arms in the area has been commented on in the reports of the National Labour Institute—Gandhi Peace Foundation Seminar on 'Bonded Labour', New Delhi, Nov. 1977 and the Government of India—United Nations ESCAP Seminar on 'Adaptation of the Administration to Rural Development', New Delhi, Aug. 1978.

and rich peasantry in the 1930s and 1940s.¹²⁹ The fourth, current, phase in the 1960s and 1970s is that of the poor and landless peasants. Thus, the leadership of peasant movements in Bhojpur have, within a century, passed from zamindars to *junkers* and kulaks and finally to the poor peasants.

In Bhojpur today 1.5 per cent of the population, made up of rich peasants and landlords, control 15.2 per cent of the total cultivable land directly.¹³⁰ In addition, although 84.8 per cent of the land is supposedly owned by smaller peasants, the high canal rates and the high cost of modern agricultural input have created a situation where poor peasants are forced to lease out lands to the richer ones.¹³¹ Thus, the 1.5 per cent of the population in actual fact controls more land than it owns. Yet, agriculture is so profitable for the rich peasants in the area that they want still more land. It was this land-hunger of theirs that caused the first rupture of traditional ties between land-owner and labourer and resulted in agrarian unrest. Traditionally, payment to an 'attached' labourer used to be made in the form of cash/kind wages *as well as* a grant of 0.20 acres for the cultivation of foodgrains and 0.02 acres for sugarcane. As the price of foodcrops increased and agriculture became more and more remunerative, the landowners started taking back these lands and paying their workers wages in cash or very inferior grains at a level below subsistence. This caused grave dissatisfaction when it was combined with the fact that the influx of tractors, particularly in the IADP (Intensive Area Development Plan) Package Programme areas, was in any case rendering a large number of such attached labourers, many of whom were ploughmen—*harwahas*—redundant to the production process. As more and more such 'specialized' and 'regular' workers joined the ranks of day labourers, wage disputes increased.¹³²

Into this situation entered some 'outside' elements, known both to the people and the police as 'Naxalites'. Among the top 'Naxalite' leaders were Satyanarain Sinha of Dhamar village and Kesho Prasad

¹²⁹ Max Harcourt, 'Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India: The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East United Provinces', in Low (ed.), op. cit.

¹³⁰ India, *Agricultural Census of India, 1970-71*, New Delhi.

¹³¹ Village surveys carried out by the National Labour Institute, New Delhi, and A. N. S. Institute, Patna, 1975-7.

¹³² Interviews with peasants of Ekwari, Gurpa and Dullanchak villages, 16-20 Mar. 1977, and with Banarasi Devi Gupta, social worker from Bhojpur, Daltonganj, 5 Apr. 1977.

Singh of Baruhan village. They were joined by grass-root workers like Jagdish Mahto, a harijan school-teacher.¹³³ Jagdish 'Master' had been forced into 'Naxalism' by the landowners themselves. The 1967 elections to the Bihar Legislative Assembly had generated a great deal of enthusiasm throughout the state as popular anger was aroused by the corrupt Congress regime under K. B. Sahay. Police firing on students in Patna had further infuriated the people, and students and teachers in particular had joined the election fray to try to defeat the Congress.¹³⁴ In Ekwari, the village of Jagdish Mahto, the campaign was at a high pitch. The fight was mainly one between Rajdeo Ram (PSP) sponsored by the upper caste landlords, and Ram Naresh Ram (CPI) backed by the lower caste peasants and labourers in that reserved (Scheduled Caste) constituency. The election had stirred up that village of 6,000 people and drawn a sharp line between landlords and the combination of poor peasants and labourers. On polling day, 12 February 1967, Jagdish Mahto, who had campaigned for the CPI candidate, protested against some electoral malpractices committed at one of the booths by the biggest landlord of the village, Nathuni Singh. For this he was so brutally assaulted that he had to be hospitalized for five months. He went through a radical transformation as he lay convalescing in hospital. Once an idealist teacher in H. D. Jain School, Arrah, concerned in a general way about the poor and social reform, he emerged as one of the founding fathers of the 'Naxalite' movement in Bhojpur.

However, before people like Jagdish Mahto were able really to organize peasant resistance in Bhojpur through the formation of a 'Kisan Mazdoor Sangram Samity', several events took place. Crops were seized by peasants in the Buxar *diara* (riverside land) under Satyanarain Sinha's leadership. Charu Mazumdar, the leader of the CPI(ML), toured certain parts of Bhojpur and convened the first Bihar State Conference of the CPI(ML) at Nathpur village (formerly in Shahabad, now in Rohtas district).¹³⁵ Jagdish 'Master' and other teachers and mofussil intellectuals organized mass meetings, demonstrations and rallies to protest against the oppression of harijans.

¹³³ The following account of Jagdish Mahto's transformation was given by his widow, Kamaleshwari Devi, in an interview at Ekwari on 19 Mar. 1977.

¹³⁴ The student movement produced a number of leaders. Ram Ashray Singh of the CPI (M), Toofan Chandra Josh formerly of the CPI (ML) and Shivanand Tiwari of the SSP (now Janata) are only some of the then student leaders who graduated to state politics.

¹³⁵ Proceedings of the Bihar State Conference of the CPI (ML), 1970 (mimeo).

Through these forums, a demand for a separate 'Harijanistan' was raised and the discontent of the harijans was interwoven into a specific Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology. However, perhaps none of these would have brought about the situation which obtains in Bhojpur today were it not for the initial apathy shown by the government and the brutal repression launched subsequently by landlords and the forces of law and order on harijans. As for the first, even the DIG (Naxalite) admitted:

When the first rumblings of conflict between the landed persons and the landless [were] meant to be heard, [these were] drowned in the meaningless, though not irrelevant in the caste-ridden state, quibbles over Harijans and the upper castes. For, very few persons have by now gone into the interior which has bad communications and a poor administrative cover. All activities centred at Patna, the state capital. The thinkers, the social and political workers and the administrators failed to discern the correct perspective. There were enough materials and men to tell the inner story but there was no one to respond to the same.¹³⁶

Taking advantage of this attitude prevalent at the higher echelons of the government, those who ruled at the village level, that is, the landlords and the *darogas*, hit out at the poor peasants.¹³⁷ Thus started the trail of violence in Bhojpur.

The first major attack came in Chawri village. One of the relatively prosperous villages in Bhojpur, it is situated in the canal belt.¹³⁸ As much as 547.11 acres of the land under cultivation are irrigated and only 78.43 acres are still unirrigated. There are 136 families in the village: 23 Bhumihars, 6 Vaisyas, 30 Dusadhs, 15 Rajwars, 30 Kumhars, 5 Ahirs, 10 Koeries, 3 Halwais, 10 Muslims, 1 Nai (barber), 1 Dhobi (washerman), 1 Lohar (blacksmith) and 1 Barhi (carpenter). Of these, the Bhumihars hold most of the land. The backward castes and harijans are labourers, and among them 90 per cent are landless. The level of literacy is fairly high: 50 per cent and 11 per cent of males and females respectively. Many of the labourers, who were later to be dubbed 'Naxalite' and either killed or arrested, had had some educa-

¹³⁶ B. N. Sinha, 'From Naxalbari to Ekwari', *Searchlight*, 11 June 1975.

¹³⁷ *Samayik Varta*, 16-31 Dec. 1977, and *Frontier*, 14 Jan. 1978.

¹³⁸ Survey carried out in Chawri village, Nov. 1977. Also Veer Bharat Talwar, 'Chawri Kand ke Baad', *Filhaal*, 5 Aug. 1973.

tion. The history of wage disputes in this village goes as far back as 1968-9. In 1971-2 the principal landlords reduced the extent of *kotha* land and the quantity of grains payable to labourers as a part of their wages. It was especially from the beginning of 1973 that the landlords hardened in their attitude. Instead of 0.25 acres of *kotha* land customarily allowed for foodgrain cultivation, they began to give only 0.15 acres. The traditional grant of 0.02 acres of sugarcane land was withdrawn from the labourers. They were no longer compensated for *katni* (harvesting) work at the rate of 1 *bojha* (sheaf) of *rabi* for every 21 *bojhas* as had been the practice until then. They also lost their share of 4 *katchi* seers (local weight) of paddy which used to be given to them at the time of *ropni* (sowing). The breakfast (*nasta*) of *sattu* (gram meal), a component of their daily wages, was discontinued. Apart from this, the landlords began to compel the landless labourers to stand watch over the fields at night, denying them the option to go home and rest. The female members of labourers' families were made to carry the harvested and threshed grain from the field to the *khalihan* (threshing ground) and thence to the landlords' godown for no additional remuneration.

Eventually it was spiralling prices which, by making subsistence altogether beyond their reach, drove the labourers to protest and demand higher wages. In April 1973 they went on strike for a few days and stopped harvesting the *rabi* crop. However, they resumed work when the landlords assured them (falsely as it turned out) of redress. Indeed, the landlords were far from reconciled to the labourers' demands. The police were called in and fired on the labourers on the pretext of discovering a 'Naxalite' den equipped with trenches, etc., on 6 May 1973. The landlords and their representatives hailed this as 'timely action in dealing with the explosive situation with a firm hand'. But the truth of the incident was there for all to grasp when even a former Police Minister ascribed it to 'a struggle between the landowners and the landless for increased wages', and a would-be Chief Minister to 'trouble [that] had been brewing between the agricultural labourers and the landlords over the payment of wages and allotment of land for tilling for at least one and a half years'.¹³⁹

That, however, did not stop the state from aiding and abetting the landlords and subjecting many parts of Bhojpur to a severe campaign

¹³⁹ *Indian Nation*, 9 and 11 May 1973.

of official repression.¹⁴⁰ On 3 March 1975, Chapra village in Piro Police Station was surrounded by the police. The following day four harijans were caught, lined up and photographed with guns thrust into their hands and then shot. On 26 March the landlords of Hadiabad village in Jagdishpur Police Station caught a landless peasant, Bisani Mahato, and burnt him alive. On 14 May three poor peasants were killed in Dulanchak village under Sahar Police Station. On 15 May one Bachchan Ahir, who had gone out to get some medicine for his ailing son, was shot dead as a 'Naxalite'. The same night, Gopal Chamar and Ram Pravesh Yadav who had led strikes for higher wages, were also shot dead. On 1 June landlords set fire to several huts belonging to harijans in Hadiabad village and burnt one person alive. Restrictions were placed on people visiting the area and even a Sarvodaya team sent by Jaya Prakash Narayan was surrounded by the CRP and made to stand at bayonet point with their hands raised for several hours. On 13 June 1975 the Sarvodaya leader Narayan himself arrived in Bhojpur and addressed a mixed crowd of peasants and kulaks in a mango-grove in Agiason village. With folded hands, he said, 'If the situation does not change in five years, I will not come back here. If we fail in this movement to bring justice, then I will not restrain you from joining the Naxalites.' The Emergency proclaimed on 25-26 June that year witnessed the continuation of violence against the peasantry and the formation of well-knit landlords' syndicates in different parts of Bhojpur as the government, on its part, launched 'Operation Thunder' as a counter-insurgency measure.¹⁴¹ In 1976, the state announced that every adult belonging to landowning families was to be equipped with guns for protection against 'anti-social elements', and the 'Shooting-and-Firing Training Centre' was inaugurated by the then Chief Minister, Dr Jagannath Mishra. There was even some talk of an aerial bombardment of 'Naxalite-infested areas'.

In face of this 'White Terror' the poor peasants were forced to take up arms in order to defend themselves. They have retaliated by killing a few landlords and their agents here and there and looting arms from the police. Today the struggle in Bhojpur has been transformed from a mere economic struggle to a struggle for honour—*ijjat ki*

¹⁴⁰ The following account is taken from the still unpublished report of the Sarvodaya committee, led by Baburao Chandawar, which was sent to Bhojpur by Jaya Prakash Narayan in May-June 1975.

¹⁴¹ Kalyan Mukherjee and Manju Kala, *op. cit.*

larai. As Kamaleshwari Devi, the widow of Jagdish 'Master', says, 'If I do not get *ijjat* (dignity), what is the point of living!'¹⁴² The war goes on.

IV Conclusion

Peasant resistance against the process of disintegration of the traditional economy under the impact of British colonial, capitalist, rule occurred in many parts of Bihar in the nineteenth century. However, it was only in the twentieth century that such resistance articulated itself in the form of a sustained movement. Leaders like Sahajanand tried to give the movement an organizational shape in the form of the Kisan Sabha while attempting to retain the basic spontaneity of agrarian unrest. Sahajanand, in particular, also tried to keep the peasant organization free from party politics. In fact, only towards the end of his life did he come to acknowledge the need for the peasantry to acquire class allies in its struggle, but no deliberate attempt was made then to bring about such class alliances. Thus, at the class level the peasantry remained isolated. On the other hand, in spite of Sahajanand's desire, the peasant movement and organization became increasingly embroiled in party politics under the impact of the nationalist movement and the increasing importance of the political parties of other classes. In this process, it lost much of its strength derived from spontaneity by becoming encapsulated within formal party structures. This loss was particularly severe because the peasantry itself was not one homogeneous entity. It contained different interests within it and was affected variously by different issues. In order to mobilize itself, under these circumstances, it needed a political understanding; instead, what it got was political organizational fetters.

The inherent division and lack of unity within the peasantry led it more often than not in the course of its movements to ignore the basic question of land redistribution and to take up other, subsidiary, issues in its place. These varied from area to area and period to period, and the attack on them was conspicuously wanting in co-ordination. Thus, in Champaran it was initially a question of exploitation by the indigo planters, then of the unfair settlement of the lands of the Bettiah estate and still later of social oppression and low wages. In

¹⁴² Interview with Kamaleshwari Devi.

Gaya and Patna the main issue, until Independence, was one of the commutation of produce rents into cash; in Monghyr, that of the *bakasht* lands; in Darbhanga, of security of tenure, and so on. Only on the question of the abolition of zamindari was the peasantry equally agitated and almost uniformly mobilized all over Bihar. But even that issue was taken up too late and 'solved' too soon to lay the foundations of a strong tradition of peasant movement.

After Independence, as the differentiation within the peasantry became more apparent, it became necessary to form sectional organizations, secure the assistance of class allies among the urban and industrial workers and the middle class, and channel the force of peasant anarchism into comprehensive struggles. Instead, omnibus organizations comprising different interests continued to exist, though weak and fragmented in form. No attempt was made to unite rural and urban struggles. No comprehensive issues covering all aspects of the lives of poor peasants were taken up. As earlier, the issues differed from place to place and the campaigns developed sporadically. In Purnea, these concerned the land question, in Madhubani the issue of *bataidari* rights, in Champaran that of social oppression, in Shahabad wages and in Monghyr the supply of agricultural inputs. Also, when a movement developed spontaneously as it did during the Land Grab phase in the early seventies, an attempt was made to formalize it, with the result that it was smothered in the process. The achievements of the fighting peasantry in Gangetic Bihar have only been partial.

Nevertheless, when one looks at the agrarian situation of Bihar today, one cannot help noticing a change from what it was at the beginning of the century or even three decades ago. Not only have the chemical and biological revolutions—the so-called Green Revolution—made a considerable impact, but even relations between the agrarian classes have been significantly modified in both form and content. It cannot be doubted that the elite-sponsored measures of land reform helped to legitimize some of those changes and indeed many of the improvements in production such as the adoption of new HYV seeds and the use of fertilizers, etc., were induced from the top. But the principal motive force of change, such as it has been, has come from the peasantry itself albeit through halting, sporadic, and sometimes even blundering actions. Any interpretation of agrarian change primarily as an elite-sponsored land reform, amounts therefore to chasing the shadow without trying to grasp the substance.

Agricultural Workers in Burdwan¹

N. K. CHANDRA

The present essay is part of a longer study on class relations and recent peasant movements in three Burdwan villages. It is based on field investigation carried out by a team of five over three and a half months in the summer of 1974; every household in each of the villages was surveyed. The emphasis here will be on economic questions like wages and earnings, underemployment and poverty. Broader issues like the types of labour contract, conditions of work, literacy and education will also be discussed, though only tangentially. Before plunging into these, however, we shall first clarify our definition of agricultural workers, and then present some general features of the Abanti region (block) within the district of Burdwan, followed by a brief description of the sample villages located in that region.²

In the Indian Census agricultural workers are defined as those who derive the major share of their incomes in the form of agricultural wages, i.e. from work on lands belonging to others. Throughout this paper our focus will be on landless agricultural labourers who constitute the bulk of the rural proletariat; they neither own land nor hold any as tenants. Agricultural wages account for almost all their earnings. Closely related are the poor peasants, the agricultural semi-proletariat, who also depend to a substantial extent on agricultural wage incomes. But the latter also own or lease in small plots of land the fruits of which, after various deductions, are insufficient for a family to

¹ A draft of the longer study was completed in 1975. The data have since been reprocessed with the financial assistance of the CMDS, Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta. I am particularly grateful to A. K. Singha in this context. The original investigation team was led by A. C. Manna who also participated actively in the formulation of the questionnaire.

² The names of the region, the sample villages, and their residents cited in the text have been altered deliberately.

subsist upon. In practice their economic and social conditions are often no better than those of the agricultural proletariat. There are certain problems specific to the poor peasantry, for instance, security and terms of tenancy, eviction by landlords, distress sale of crops, etc.; these are outside the scope of this essay.

Two further remarks are necessary. Landless agricultural labourers as defined above constitute a subset of the Census category of agricultural workers; the latter would include some, but not all, of our poor peasants. Secondly 'peasant' implies for us anyone who participates manually in cultivation; thus 'landless agricultural labourers' and 'landless peasants' are synonymous and equally appropriate. Needless to add, we do not subscribe to the opinion of many academics that peasants cannot be labourers. Apart from the socio-economic similarities between the poor and the landless peasants already hinted at, a radical transformation of rural society in semi-feudal countries like India depends largely on the possibilities of a broader alliance of classes formed under the joint leadership of these two classes along with the urban proletariat.

These two classes together form the 'lower classes' for our purposes; the 'upper classes', by implication, include landlords, feudal or capitalist, rich peasants and middle peasants. Members of these classes do not sell their labour power; otherwise there are a number of differences (which need not detain us here) between these classes. It would be erroneous to introduce the level of income or consumption as a dividing line between the classes. There are agricultural labour families who are better off than some landlords in terms of income. However, the average income of an agricultural labour or poor peasant family is much lower than that of an upper class family within the same village or region.

The Region

Abanti is among the most prosperous regions in Burdwan, if not the whole of West Bengal. It has been well known for its rice yields. With an area of 84 square miles lying a few miles to the north of Burdwan town, it had a population of 88,000 in 1971 of which nearly a third came from the Scheduled Castes and about 7 per cent from the Santal tribes. The net sown area stood at 39,760 acres in 1973-4 and was fully irrigated. Government canals alone fed 30,000 acres in the kharif and 15,000 acres in the rabi season. Tanks irrigated two to

three thousand acres, while private shallow tubewells accounted for up to 16,000 acres. Quite often the same plot of land had the benefit of more than one source of irrigation. Thanks to these the gross cropped area was as high as 65,000 acres of which ordinary paddy took up 41,600 acres, high-yielding paddy another 12,000 acres, the remainder being devoted to wheat, pulses, potato, oilseeds, sugar-cane, jute and vegetables.

Rice production in 1973-4 was fairly high at 295 kg per capita, excluding 12.5 per cent for seed and wastage. If consumption were 142 kg in accordance with the nutritional norms (taking into account age, sex and the activity pattern of the population),³ there should have been a potential surplus of 153 kg per capita or more than half of the net output, which is unusually high. Considering other crops as well as non-agricultural incomes, the per capita income in Abanti should have been around Rs 976 as against an average of Rs 936 for West Bengal or Rs 856 for India as a whole, all at 1973-4 prices.

In view of its potentials Abanti was selected in 1962 as one of the IADP (Intensive Area Development Programme) Blocks by the Government of India and concerted efforts were made to raise the agricultural output, especially after the onset of the Green Revolution strategy. A minimum of 250 shallow tubewells were installed by private owners up to 1974. A few dozen tractors and power-tillers were in operation by that time. The HYV programme also made rapid strides. Commercial fertilizers were made available in fairly large quantities. As against a national average of about 41 kg of all types of chemical fertilizers per acre of total cropped area, in Abanti the consumption was five times higher at around 200 kg.

The Block, however, had few industries. Most of these were agrobased like rice mills, husking machines, bone-crushing, *bidi* manufacturing. There were also a few household industries. Manufacturing accounted for a bare 2 per cent of the work force, while cultivators, agricultural labourers and tertiary sector workers formed 32, 53 and 13 per cent respectively of the total, according to the 1971 Census.

With the eradication of malaria which used to be a killer disease in the whole district there has been a distinct improvement on the health front. But since the late 1950s there have been few changes. With one

³ The data on nutritional norms used in the text are taken from P. V. Sukhatme, *Feeding India's Millions* (Bombay, 1965), p. 35.

health centre and just one sanitary unit in Abanti, people have to go to Burdwan town for hospital services. There were about 43 doctors in the whole Block of which only 10 were qualified allopaths; of the rest 18 were homoeopaths. On the other hand drinking water was available from tubewells in most villages. As for education there were 74 primary schools spread across 97 villages, and 19 secondary schools. But the literacy rate is extremely low at 30 per cent.

The Sample Villages

The Block consisted of about 100 *mouzas* or revenue villages. By simple random sampling two were selected, Nalhati and Karulia. The former is rather large and has for a long time been split into two distinct villages, Nalhati and Mirzapur.

Karulia had, according to the 1971 Census, a cultivated area of 169.16 acres, and 128 households with a population of 684 of which the Scheduled Castes and Tribes formed 41 and 6 per cent respectively. Out of 173 workers nearly 70 per cent were engaged in agriculture and livestock. The bigger mouza of Nalhati had 421.22 acres of cultivated area and 159 households with a population of 1,077, including 6 per cent of Scheduled Castes and 21 of tribals. The workforce totalled 264, of which nearly 90 per cent was in agriculture and livestock. For the two mouzas taken together the percentage of women in the workforce was only 4 and that of agricultural workers, male or female, as high as 36. Both these census percentages, as we shall show later, are somewhat misleading.

The land-man ratio in the two mouzas is worse than that for the Block as a whole and consequently, the potential surplus of rice is only one-quarter of the estimated net output of 191 kg per capita in 1973-4. The extent of double cropping was only a little over one-third of the net area sown while the official figure was close to four-fifths. Both these mouzas are served by government canals for irrigation, yet the area under rabi crops remains low due to the absence of field channels. Agriculturally, Karulia is quite advanced with a high cropping intensity, application of modern inputs like pumps, fertilizers and pesticides, and close links with Block level officials for obtaining new information as well as assistance in various forms. The two components of the other mouza, Nalhati, are markedly different from each other. The bigger village, Nalhati, is fairly backward, but Mirzapur is more 'progressive'.

There are both similarities and dissimilarities between the three villages in land relations. In none of these are the old zamindar families in the limelight. Nalhati and Mirzapur belonged to an absentee zamindar. In Karulia there are still two families from among the erstwhile zamindars one of which is pauperized, while the other remains prosperous. On the whole, the old feudal character has disappeared from these areas. Most of the land is owner-cultivated, often with the help of hired hands. Land leased out as a percentage of the total, according to our survey, varied within a small range: 15 in Karulia, 18 in Mirzapur and 20 in Nalhati. Land distribution, however, is quite different. The top two families owned 40 per cent of the land owned by all the resident families of Nalhati, i.e. including land lying outside the village boundaries, but owned by those residents; however in Karulia and Mirzapur these were only 19 and 15 respectively. If one considered the top four, their shares go up to 75, 40 and 22 respectively. Share-cropping households constituted as much as 38 per cent of all households in Nalhati as against 19 in Karulia and 17 in Mirzapur. Conversely, the proportion of households who did not own any land was 0.57 in Nalhati, 0.46 in Karulia and 0.22 in Mirzapur. Thus in terms of land distribution Mirzapur was the most egalitarian, while neighbouring Nalhati stood at the other extreme.

Land reform measures were half-hearted. Land vested in the government according to the ceiling laws amounted to only 3 and 63 acres in the mouzas of Karulia and Nalhati respectively; these should have been higher by another 31 and 73 acres, according to our survey. Of the land vested in Nalhati, official records showed, only a little over one-half was distributed to 81 persons; our enquiry revealed that 36 of the latter were fictitious names, though a few could have been residents in neighbouring villages. Of the 45 identified beneficiaries three-fifths denied (sometimes falsely) having received any land from the government. We found that among the actual recipients were: one of the top four landowners, 11 others from among the landlords or rich peasants and 28 from other classes, mostly poor peasants. Our enquiry on the actual possession of vested land showed that nearly one-half was held by four families from among the top ten, while the legally eligible got barely a fifth; apparently, one-third was unfit for cultivation. Vested land in Karulia was not distributed at all.

As for the other main objective of tenancy reforms, hardly had any beginning been made. Land leased-in stood at 18 per cent of the

cultivated area and share-croppers (a few from the upper classes, but overwhelmingly from the poor peasantry) constituted 31 per cent of all families in the two mouzas. No tenant had got himself officially registered. Most of them paid one-half of the gross output as rent though the legally stipulated ratio was one-fourth. Over the ten years prior to 1974 (with the exception of 1969) as many as 55 or three-fifths of all share-croppers had been evicted at least once.

Most of the evicted tenants became landless. There was also a reverse process of creating new tenants from amongst the agricultural labourers, which was inadequately documented by us. However, each respondent was asked about his father's occupation. For the two mouzas together 28 agricultural labourers indicated that their fathers were cultivators; conversely, 19 cultivators replied that their fathers were landless. It is well-known that many poverty-stricken persons tend to paint a rosier picture of the past than is warranted by facts. Even then the intergenerational shift in occupation towards wage labour cannot be dismissed altogether; this shift, however, is small. The data also reveal how thin is the wall separating the two lower classes; there are frequent movements in either direction.

Lastly, a few words about the morale of the lower classes. A political upheaval had taken place between 1967 and 1970 in Nalhati mouza. Standing crops on a part of the land of those who held it in excess of the legal ceiling were forcibly harvested by the organized peasantry; rival leaders and political parties entered the scene, which weakened the movement. Though few tangible gains remained with the poor and some of them were actually victimized later on by the landlords, the latter received a major psychological setback. The lower classes had become much more conscious of their rights. Karulia by contrast was unaffected by the waves of 1967-70 and the lower classes seemed to be quite subdued, if not firmly under the control of their masters.

Types of Labour Contract

Unlike in industry one still encounters in our rural areas a variety of labour contracts. Following the national tradition and in view of the prevalent illiteracy, there are hardly any written contracts. Oral engagements, usually sanctified by custom, are the rule.

We may begin with the *mahindar*. He is employed on an annual basis. Quite often the same person remains attached to the same

master for many years together; the period may even exceed one generation. A *mahindar* is expected to perform all agricultural jobs from ploughing to harvesting. He also looks after the cattle belonging to the master; he has to prepare their food, especially at sundown. As for domestic chores he may help occasionally, but never regularly; generally, a *mahindar*'s work is considered superior to that of a domestic servant and hence the former is reluctant to do the latter kind of work. Payments are made on an annual basis. One part, a fairly small one, as we shall soon see, is in cash. Wages in kind assume several forms. The *mahindar* gets one or two meals daily; sometimes he also gets some breakfast or tiffin, i.e. something like a snack in the West. A certain quantity of rice or paddy may also be given on a monthly or annual basis. Finally, the *mahindar* receives some annual clothing for himself. But the mode of payment is not uniform. In certain cases he receives a plot of land for the maintenance of his family; the whole of the output goes to him. He has no tenurial rights over it and loses the land as soon as he ceases to be a *mahindar*. Generally, whenever he gets some land for self-cultivation, his wages in paddy are reduced; other components of the wage remain unchanged.

Because of the security it offers, the *mahindar*'s job is much sought after. As a result those with a sturdy physique are preferred. Their children are also better fed than those coming from other agricultural workers' families and sons have a better chance of succeeding their fathers to their jobs. In view of the close nexus between master and servant, the latter's wife may also be employed as a domestic servant in the master's family.

Another interesting aspect of the *mahindar*'s role is that at times he acts as a manager on behalf of the *malik* (employer). When the *malik* is indolent or when he has a number of other things besides cultivation to look after, the *mahindar* may take on the responsibility of recruiting other temporary workers, ensuring proper application of seeds, manures, fertilizers and pesticides, and overseeing all other field operations.

Next comes the group of *nagares*. A *nagare* is a contract-labourer of the semi-permanent type. The *malik* has a sort of first claim on his labour services. Each day he must report to the employer first thing in the morning and must work for him if he is so asked. Only if the master has no job to offer is he free to look for alternative employment.

Although the contract is annual, it can and often is renewed depending on the needs of the employer and the degree of mutual understanding that develops between the *nagare* and his master. Following the contractual pattern of employment, wage payments have two components—one daily and the other annual or, occasionally, monthly. The latter is usually in paddy, sometimes supplemented by a few items of clothing. The daily payments are made both in cash and in kind, for each day of work actually put in. Wages in kind may take the form of either meals and/or paddy-cum-rice.

A *nagare* has rarely any other task than that of a labourer. But as with the *mahindar*, members of the *nagare*'s family may receive preferential treatment in case certain other jobs are available in the master's family. His wife may, for instance, be employed as a maid-servant.

Mahindars and *nagares*, however, form a minority of the community of agricultural labourers. The majority are employed on a casual basis from day to day somewhat like casual workers in an Indian factory. In some respects the casual agricultural labourer resembles the free wage labourer in so far as he is not theoretically bound to any particular employer. He can change jobs at his volition; he can as easily be fired.

In the regions surveyed by us we found that the casual worker could be hired either for a day or for a half-day. In the latter case the payment is almost exclusively in cash. For a full day's work the employee receives payment in both cash and kind. Most frequently, wages in kind are paid in paddy or rice.

A special category of agricultural worker is found in our survey region, namely that of the *botare*. A *botare* literally means a ploughman. He is an expert in this respect, much better than most other field workers who may also perform the same job. Among other things this requires a very strong pair of shoulders so that the man can control the movements of his two bullocks. The *botare* is somewhat like a skilled worker—a fitter or latheman—in a factory. But in view of the seasonality of agriculture there is no job for a *botare* except during the ploughing season which lasts barely two months. With the introduction of the second crop on a large scale there is another period, of a shorter duration, when his services are much in demand. For these months the *botare* often enters into a contract with one or more landowners at rates of pay somewhat higher than that of an

ordinary casual worker. During the remaining months the *botare* looks for ordinary jobs at the usual rates. Some *nagares* and *mahindars* are also *botares* in which case they are tied to individual employers.

Landowners in recent years have been bringing in outside labourers on a large scale, mainly Santals. As they come during the harvesting season from mid-November to mid-January, our survey team could not meet them. They are usually hired individually by the *maliks* and assured of a minimum number of days' work. Once the season is over, they go back to their own villages. They receive wages in cash and kind at a rate higher than that for local labourers.

Cowboys constitute the fourth category of labourers. They are usually children between the ages of 8 and 15. They take the master's cattle out of the shed early in the morning and look after them till sunset. During these hours the cowboys have to be careful lest the cattle stray too far away from the herd, or enter into the paddy fields destroying the standing crops. Children are entrusted with this job because it is not very strenuous and because the rates of pay are lower than for adult males. A cowboy has an annual contract. Invariably, he comes from a poor peasant or an agricultural labour family. (In middle and rich peasant homes the children are often entrusted with the job, and obviously without any payment.) The wages of a cowboy are usually quite meagre, particularly the cash part of it. Payments in kind are almost always made in the form of meals; he eats all his food at the employer's home. Saving on the upkeep of a child is a great advantage for poor families; besides, the child as a cowboy is assured of more regular food than his own family could normally provide. Finally, the cowboy also receives some clothing every year from his employer.

Although slightly *hors propos*, a few words on the domestic servants in rural areas may help to illuminate the conditions of the rural poor. Male servants are rather rare in the areas investigated by us. Generally women take up these jobs. These may be for a whole year or for parts of it. Only the richest people can afford to engage someone round the year; many more from the less affluent, but still quite prosperous, families engage maid-servants on special occasions. Though the maid-servants come predominantly from the milieu of the rural poor, there are cases of women, specially older ones, from middle peasant families taking to domestic service in order to augment the family resources. Like cowboys the maid-servants tend to be paid

very little cash by the employers; meals with the latter are the most important of the rewards. In several cases, when they prefer to eat in their own homes with their families, payment is received in rice or paddy. All maids employed for the whole year usually receive an amount of clothing considered by the employers to be adequate for their needs over the period. Most of them again are employed, not on a full-day, but on a half-day basis.

Two further points need to be mentioned before we pass on to the next section. In addition to the wages mentioned, every agricultural labourer, but not the cowboy, receives for every day of work a fixed number of *bidis*, a small quantum of mustard oil, etc., the total value of which comes to Re 0.30. Secondly, *begar*, i.e. unpaid or underpaid labour services, is extracted to a varying extent from each worker. Domestic servants are equally subjected to this type of exploitation.

Working Conditions

An agricultural worker has, when employed, a hard and long day. It lasts from dawn to dusk. Depending on the season he starts field work between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. and finishes at between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. In between there are at least two breaks, one for breakfast at around 9.30 a.m. for half an hour at the most, and a longer one stretching to an hour for the midday meal. Breakfast is carried to the field either by the worker himself when he leaves for work or brought to him by someone else. For the midday meal he goes either to his own home or to his employer's. Nowadays meals are generally taken in the labourers' homes, even if these are cooked at the employer's residence. At lunch time in the villages one sees large numbers of them or their wives each carrying a plateful of boiled rice and a few vegetables to be consumed by the entire family. Their poverty and a desire to assert their independence are the main reasons why food is being consumed today at the workers' own homes.

Apart from the two main breaks the worker also manages to snatch some minutes to smoke a *bidi* or two. If no one happens to be observing him he is not averse to dozing off in the fields, especially on a hot summer afternoon.

On the other hand, many workers are often obliged to work beyond the stipulated hours. As he approaches the master's house at the end of the day to collect his daily wages he may be asked to look after the cattle for a while. Or he may be sent out on an errand. Few

workers would refuse such a command; if they did, they may not be able to keep their jobs. The *mahindar* and *nagare* may not have to worry about the very next day, but the next year is always ahead. Many of them often work till as late as 8 or 8.30 p.m. at the master's residence.

For those who are employed for half the day, work begins at dawn. They have breakfast at the same time as the others. They are supposed to finish before lunch-time which should be around 1 p.m. and then go home. Quite often they are detained till two or even three in the afternoon without any extra pay. Many of these workers virtually work the whole day for approximately half the wages. In Nalhati throughout the year, excepting the two harvesting months, a majority of the casual workers are engaged for half-days only. In Karulia and Mirzapur this is less frequent owing to the second crop.

The employers, we found, were not generally satisfied with the quality and quantity of work put in by the workers. According to them, the latter have turned rather indolent of late and, thanks to the spread of leftist ideas, have no qualms about it. They are also prone to idle away their time as much as they can. Hence employers who are serious about the business of cultivation pay regular visits to the field when their men are at work. Some keep a close watch for most parts of the day. Since the HYV paddy is relatively new, some of the enthusiastic ones stay on in the fields in order to ensure that the correct practices are adhered to at various stages.

Some employers can be very harsh. An incident took place only a few years ago, though our informants could not recollect the exact date. One summer afternoon a few labourers found to their relief that the master had gone on some urgent work elsewhere, and they all lay down for a nap. In the meanwhile a relative of the master happened to pass by. As he woke up one of the labourers and started rebuking him, the latter got annoyed and retorted rather sharply; all his mates chimed in. The relative made his exit. After some time the master himself appeared on the scene. Hidden behind a tree he saw them all lying on their backs. Slowly he approached the original culprit and kicked him very hard. Through bleary eyes the labourer beheld the figure of the tyrant and gave a shriek. Like an angry bull the tyrant now went charging at his labourers, hitting them as hard as he could. Yet there was no resistance. The victims ran hither and thither to save their skins.

Use of naked force of this kind is not very frequent. But the threat is always there, enough to 'discipline' the workers. There is above all no remedy, legal or customary, against such a feudal type of oppression. And the labourers' morale is so low that they do not feel too humiliated by such thrashing.

Standard Wages

We shall first indicate the standard wage rates as narrated to us by the knowledgeable people in the three villages. The normative rates do not vary significantly between these places; after all agricultural conditions are broadly similar and distances between the villages are not very great.

For a full day's work casual labourers should get anything between Rs 1.50 and Rs 2.50 per day. During the transplantation and harvesting seasons the highest levels are reached; at other times the lowest rate prevails. In addition, they get one and a quarter *seers* or about 1,100 grams of rice. A dozen *bidis* and some mustard oil, and occasionally, a few vegetables are the only 'perquisites'.

Those who work half a day get Rs 1.50 in cash. A small amount of *muri*, a variety of dry puffed rice that is an extremely delicious snack popular throughout Bengal, is also given; its quantum could be around 200 grams. Perquisites are the same for a full day's work. Thus the main difference between the full-day and half-day wages lies in the substitution of 1,100 grams of rice for 200 grams of *muri*. The monetary value of the total daily wages comes to Rs 4.39 for a full day; a half-day labourer should get Rs 2.40 or just over one-half of the former. In making these estimates we have also taken account of wages during the slack season; prices of rice and *muri* are the weighted averages of prices throughout the year.

The *nagare* typically gets the same daily wage as the casual worker and experiences the same seasonal variation in earnings. We could not ascertain the standard wage for the *botare* with accuracy. We merely learnt that it is somewhat higher than that for a casual worker, perhaps by one or two rupees per day.

A *mahindar* should receive annually somewhere between Rs 120 and Rs 160 as cash wage. The annual clothing received by him is fairly standardized; it consists of 2 to 3 pieces of coarse cotton dhoti, 2 to 4 pieces of cheap hand-woven napkin-cum-towel (*gamchha*), one vest and one wrapper or cotton shawl with which he protects himself

during the winter. All this costs about Rs 37.50 per year. He receives the same daily perquisites in the form of *bidis*, etc., as other agricultural labourers. The main income of a *mahindar* takes a number of alternative forms. Basically, he is ensured two square meals a day plus some paddy and straw to meet the needs of his family. Sometimes he gets all his meals from the employer plus some paddy for the family. In other cases he may just take the midday meal and receive some paddy or rice in lieu of his evening meal; there is some extra rice or paddy for the family. On occasions he may be allotted a plot of land varying between 0.5 and 0.8 acre; all the crops raised on it are appropriated by him. Correspondingly, there is a reduction in the amount of paddy given as wages in kind. The cost of cultivation on the land allotted is usually borne by the *mahindar*. But now with the higher levels of cash expenditure on new inputs, the employer may even pay for all of it. In short, there is no uniform, customary practice in regard to the remuneration of the *mahindar*; any number of permutations and combinations are possible, provided it all adds up to two square meals for the *mahindar* and some surplus for his family.

Cowboys receive very little in cash, hardly a rupee or two per month. They get annual clothing consisting of one shirt, one vest, a wrapper and 2 to 3 hand-woven napkin-cum-towels, totalling about Rs 18 in value. Their main earning is in the form of meals taken at the employer's residence.

Domestic servants, too, receive fairly small amounts by way of cash; at times they may receive nothing at all. As annual clothing the women get just one *sari* each costing about Rs 10. Since they are mostly part-time workers, they get just one meal.

So far we have described the standard wages as they should be. Now we go on to describe the actual amounts received by our survey respondents. For all non-cash items we enquired about the quantities and used the year-round average retail prices to compute the money value. There was, however, one lacuna in our data. We failed to get the details of meals taken at the employer's home; we had merely asked about the number of main meals and tiffins provided. Based on local enquiry on a subsequent occasion, the details of 'standard' meals assumed in our calculation are given below (Table 1). We should warn the reader that these are rather on the high side.

TABLE 1: *Composition and Value of Meals Taken at the Employer's Residence*

Type of meals		Male adult		Female adult		Cowboys	
		Quantity (gms)	Value (Rs)	Quantity (gms)	Value (Rs)	Quantity (gms)	Value (Rs)
All meals	Rice	800	1.86	800	1.86	600	1.39
	Muri	200	0.57	—	—	200	0.57
	Others	—	0.53	—	0.50	200	0.57
	Total		2.96		2.36		2.37
1½ meals, i.e. one main meal and one tiffin	Rice	400	0.93	400	0.93		
	Muri	200	0.57	125	0.35		
	Others	—	0.26	—	0.26		
	Total		1.76		1.54		
1 main meal	Rice	400	0.93	400	0.93		
	Others	—	0.26	—	0.26		
	Total		1.19		1.19		

Actual Wages

In Tables 2 to 6 below we present the data on actual wages received by different types of agricultural labourers and domestic servants. While the daily wage rates for casual workers and *nagares* are relatively accurate, the annual earnings for *nagares* are not. For, in certain cases the *nagare* respondents failed to recollect the number of days they had worked during the previous year; in all such cases we put it at 300 which is the maximum. On the other hand, the *mahindars* too did not indicate the annual number of working days; once again on the basis of local enquiry a figure of 353 was assumed. Since some *mahindars* work for a few weeks on their tied plot of land, this might have been a slight overestimate leading to a fall in the daily wage rate for them. On the other hand, the *mahindars* do not receive any meals or paddy for the days that they work for themselves. Taking both these factors together the overestimate should not be significant.

The average daily wage rate for a casual worker amounted to Rs

1.36 in cash plus Rs 1.94 in kind, equivalent to 840 grams of rice; this excludes the standard perquisites in the form of *bidis*, etc. As a matter of fact, the wages in kind were varied; some received rice, some paddy, others *muri* and meals. Surprisingly, the rate seems highest in Nalhati which is the poorest agriculturally, and lowest at Karulia, but the differences are fairly small. As between pure agricultural labourers and poor peasants the wage rates are fairly similar. If Nalhati workers have a lead in terms of wage rates they lag far behind in terms of yearly earnings since they are employed on much fewer days. The annual earnings per worker in all the villages combined come to Rs 171.71 in cash plus Rs 282.55 in kind against 126.4 days of work. If the entire earnings were spent on rice the worker could get just 169 kg of rice throughout the year.

We may also compare the actual wage data with the 'standard' rates mentioned earlier. The part in kind remains as expected; but the cash part is in practice much below the 'normal' rates. The shortfall is by about Rs 0.64 against actual wages of Rs 1.36. This is entirely due to the 'advance' system described later. By taking advantage of their creditor position most of the big employers pay reduced wages to their workers.

The daily wage rate of the *nagares* is somewhat higher. The cash element is low at Re 1.00 but the kind element is significantly higher at Rs 3.13; the total thus comes to Rs 4.13 as against Rs 3.60 for the casual workers. As we noted earlier, there is an over-estimate in the number of days worked. From our data the average number of days worked is as high as 289.7. The annual earnings then work out to Rs 259.36 in cash plus Rs 809.93 in kind. In terms of rice alone the annual earnings amounted to 463 kg. These are good wages by nutritional standards, enough to leave a certain margin for the remaining members of the family. As between the villages, Karulia stands at the bottom, Nalhati is at the top closely followed by Mirzapur.

The *mahindar's* annual earnings, averaged for all the villages, is as high as Rs 1,241. The cash part is extremely small at Rs 70 only. He gets one and a half meals every day. All but one received annual clothing. Over and above this the average *mahindar* got 238 kg of paddy, some straw and rice as well. On a daily basis his wage comes to Rs 3.52 which is slightly lower than that of a casual worker. But the continuity of work makes a world of difference. In terms of rice his wage comes to 537 kg a year; if his income is supplemented by that

of his wife or a cowboy son, his family would be well above the threshold of starvation.

The cowboy obtained just a little over one rupee per month in cash, two meals daily and paddy amounting to 55 kg for the whole year. All of them got clothing. No discrepancy was observed between the normative and the actual wage rates.

As for domestic servants living with their own families, we did not encounter many except at Karulia where 22 were found. There were only 1 in Nalhati, and 4 in Mirzapur; but the information in these cases was inadequate. It is better to concentrate on Karulia. Here the cash wages amounted to only Rs 16.73 per year. About half of them received one meal a day, while a quarter of the total got annual clothing. The value of wages in kind per year was Rs 289. Given the fact that most of the workers were women engaged part-time, the wages were nearly enough for the bare survival of the individual; but it did not leave any surplus for the family.

Credit Relations

An overwhelming majority of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers live in perpetual debt, landlords and employers being the main sources of credit. Government loans were monopolized by the upper classes. Out of a total of Rs 46,000 for the sample villages only two poor peasants obtained Rs 100 each and two agricultural labourers got Rs 20 and Rs 15 respectively, all four of them being from Karulia. There was none among these latter classes who had received any loans from other institutions like co-operatives, commercial banks, etc.

Owners of retail shops were among the most important lenders to the poor. At Nalhati nearly 80 per cent of the village population makes its regular purchases from a shop belonging to Janaki Dutta, the second biggest landlord. While there is often very little formal interest on loans, the poor are usually cheated on weights and measurements, quality, etc., very much like Third World governments borrowing on apparently soft terms from the governments of the richer countries.

A fourth source of credit is the moneylender. One curious feature is that women from well-to-do middle or rich peasant families advance small sums (sometimes in kind) to women from the poorer sections

TABLE 2: Wages of Casual Agricultural Labourers

Village	Class	No. of workers		Av. no. days per worker	Average earnings per worker per year			Average earnings per day		
		Male	Female		Cash (Rs)	Kind (Rs)	Total (Rs)	Cash (Rs)	Kind (Rs)	Total (Rs)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Nalhati	Pure agr. labourers	18	18	84.64	134.22	213.05	347.27	1.59	2.52	4.11
	Poor Peasants	25	16	104.63	167.72	231.97	399.69	1.60	2.22	3.82
	Total	43	34	95.29	151.80	223.12	374.92	1.59	2.34	3.93
Mirzapur	Pure agr. labourers	10	1	191.36	440.45	216.08	656.53	2.30	1.13	3.43
	Poor Peasants	5	1	84.67	150.25	158.53	308.78	1.78	1.87	3.65
	Total	15	2	153.71	338.03	195.75	533.78	2.20	1.27	3.47

Village	Class	No. of workers		Av. no. days per worker	Average earnings per worker per year			Average earnings per day					
		Male	Female		Cash (Rs)	Kind (Rs)	Total (Rs)	Cash (Rs)	Kind (Rs)	Total (Rs)			
											3	4	5
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11			
Karulia	Pure agr. labourers	28	28	160.07	167.75	380.32	548.07	1.05	2.38	3.43			
	Poor Peasants	17	15	127.72	138.20	300.55	438.75	1.08	2.35	3.43			
	Total	45	43	48.31	157.01	351.31	508.32	1.06	2.37	3.43			
All Villages	Pure agr. labourers	56	47	137.05	185.16	322.19	508.35	1.36	2.35	3.71			
	Poor Peasants	47	32	112.47	154.18	230.87	385.05	1.37	2.05	3.42			
	Total	103	79	126.38	171.71	282.55	454.26	1.36	2.24	3.60			

TABLE 3: Wages of Nagares
(semi-permanent agricultural labourers)

Village	No. of workers	No. of days worked	Average earnings per worker per year (Rs)			Average earnings per work-day (Rs)		
			Cash	Kind	Total	Cash	Kind	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nalhati	11	2,815	254.00	996.62	1,250.62	0.99	3.89	4.89
Mirzapur	7	1,681	273.50	797.84	1,071.34	1.14	3.32	4.46
Karulia	14	3,780	256.50	692.86	949.36	0.95	2.57	3.52
All Villages	32	8,276	259.36	809.93	1,069.28	1.00	3.13	4.13

TABLE 4: Wages of Mahindars
(permanent agricultural labourers)

Village	No. of workers	No. of days worked	Average earnings per worker per year (Rs)			Average earnings per worker per day (Rs)		
			Cash	Kind	Total	Cash	Kind	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nalhati	10	3,530	79.50	1,295.57	1,375.07	0.23	3.67	3.90
Mirzapur	6	2,118	93.33	920.15	1,013.48	0.26	2.61	2.87
Karulia	14	4,942	53.00	1,184.16	1,237.16	0.15	3.36	3.51
All Villages	30	10,590	69.90	1,171.50	1,241.40	0.20	3.32	3.52

TABLE 5: Wages of Cowboys

Village	No. of workers	No. of days worked	Average earnings per worker per year (Rs)			Average earnings per work-day (Rs)		
			Cash	Kind	Total	Cash	Kind	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nalhati	5	1,825	17.00	842.57	859.57	0.05	2.31	2.36
Mirzapur	1	365	—	676.25	676.25	—	1.85	1.85
Karulia	7	2,555	10.71	737.85	748.56	0.03	2.02	2.05
All Villages	13	4,740	12.31	773.39	785.70	0.03	2.12	2.15

TABLE 6: Wages of Domestic Servants

Village	No. of workers	No. of days worked	Average earnings per worker per year (Rs)			Average earnings per work-day (Rs)		
			Cash	Kind	Total	Cash	Kind	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nalhati	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mirzapur	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Karulia	22	2,861	16.73	282.04	298.77	0.13	2.17	2.30
All Villages	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

against pots and pans.⁴ In addition, there were the pawnbrokers though we failed to identify them except in Mirzapur. Finally, in Karulia three agricultural labourers claimed to have received between 20 and 280 kg of paddy sometime in the past as an interest-free loan from the *dharmagola* (a traditional type of co-operative granary set up to help the poor, especially in times of scarcity) which was, however, defunct at the time of our survey.

The average loan per borrowing family worked out to Rs 149 for agricultural labourers and Rs 213 for poor peasants. The non-borrowers accounted for about 8 and 25 per cent respectively of the total families in these two classes; the actual percentage was probably smaller due to the shyness of respondents to disclose information on their debts. The figures are given in Table 7.

It is interesting that when respondents mentioned debts in terms of paddy these could be with or without interest. Whenever the amount was in rupees, the interest was put anywhere between 3 and 10 per cent per month, 5 being the modal number. Far more frequently, loans received by agricultural workers, whether in cash or in kind, were repaid in the form of underpaid labour services during the harvesting season.

From the employer's point of view this system of wage advances had two merits. Firstly, even in a situation of acute underemployment

⁴ Ranajit Guha informs me that this is an old practice and that an interesting piece of literary evidence pertaining to the first half of this century can be found in Bibhuti-bhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Pather Panchali*. See the latter's *Bibhutirachanabali*, vol. I (Calcutta, Bengali Year 1386: reprint), pp. 145-6.

it makes sense to book labourers ahead. For it is tedious and vexatious to have to find a new worker every day and explain to him how the work should proceed; this is similar to the general upper class preference for an 'old' domestic servant. Secondly, wage advances bring some cash profits to the lenders. While the standard cash wage per day was Rs 2 per day in the sample villages, an indebted worker got only Re 1; there was no change in the wages paid in kind. On the surface the transaction is interest-free in so far as the total wage cut equals the amount of loan. However, the price of rice at the time of borrowing (monsoon) was twice as high as that during repayment (winter harvest). Due to the seasonal fluctuation in prices the borrower paid a 100 per cent rate of interest for a maximum of 3 months or an effective rate of 300 per cent per annum. The rate would be lower in years of milder seasonal fluctuation in the price of rice, as might have been the case after 1975 with the building up of large stocks of foodgrains by the Government of India.

From the landlord's point of view the effective rate of interest on loans is not 300, but only 100 per cent. For his capital (in paddy) had to be kept idle for eight months after the previous harvest before it was lent to the workers. Orthodox economists have ascribed this excessive interest to the high risks involved in lending without any collateral. Actually, the risks are minimal. The borrower can default only if he falls sick or flees the village. As for the former, the landowners rarely lend to chronically sick workers. Given the paucity of employment opportunities in most of rural India not many workers can take to their heels just because of small debts.

The debts are, indeed, quite small. For all the agricultural labour households these stood at Rs 11,593 (see Table 7) as against their total annual earnings of Rs 140,606 (calculated from Tables 2 to 6) or a mere 8 per cent. By lending such trifles the landowners were able to enhance their relative power *vis-à-vis* the lower classes in all spheres, economic, political and social.

Surplus Labour and Immigrant Workers

Two other factors greatly weakened the bargaining position of the poorer sections, namely, the existence of massive underemployment compounded by the immigration of outside labourers during the busy season. A glance at Table 2 for casual workers shows that agricultural labourers had no work for the major part of the year,

TABLE 7: Borrowings of the Rural Poor from Private Sources

	Karulia	Nalhati	Mirzapur	All villages
<i>Agricultural labourers</i>				
1. Total loans (Rs)	6,086	3,810	1,697	11,593
2. Average loan per borrower (Rs)	149	152	141	149
3. Number of non-borrowers	0	5	2	7
<i>Poor peasants</i>				
1. Total loans (Rs)	2,865	4,414	2,420	9,699
2. Average loan per borrower (Rs)	179	210	484	231
3. Number of non-borrowers	7	3	2	12

reckoning annual workdays at 300 only. For poor peasants if one assumes that in addition to wage-employment they worked an average of 50 days a year on their own holdings, their unemployed labour-days come to slightly less than one-half. By any yardstick both the ratios are frightfully large. Instead of looking at casual workers (including poor peasants) only, it might be equally pertinent to examine the underemployment rate for all agricultural workers, casual, permanent or semi-permanent: In percentages it came to 33 in Karulia, 25 in Mirzapur, 47 in Nalhati and 38 for all the villages together; these are only a shade better than those for casual workers owing to the small proportion of *mahindars* and *nagares* (who were assumed to be fully employed) in the total.

However, these estimates are on the low side. For many women do not appear as workers since there are so few jobs going around. This is particularly true for the women from the poor peasant class.

In the upper classes, too, there are many who are unemployed either because they do not like agricultural work and/or because they are waiting for some kind of 'sedentary work'. Caste as such does not appear to be a big hindrance. Overriding the religious taboo there were a couple of Brahmin agricultural workers who were compelled to take up such work through sheer hunger.

And yet employers at Karulia have been importing outside labourers from Dumka, a poverty-stricken region on the neighbouring state of Bihar, for the last few years at least. The underlying reasons were succinctly summarized for us by Haridhan Banerji, the local kisan leader. Haridhan claimed to have worked for the rural poor over the

years in order to improve their conditions; but he failed, so he said, because the workers are too short-sighted and irresponsible. A local worker, according to him, is rather inefficient and tries to take time off on one pretext or another. In the middle of the morning he wants to have a rest of between thirty and forty-five minutes in order to smoke a couple of *bidis* at leisure or go off to drink water. Even when both are supplied to him in the field, his wife may come by on the plea that he must attend to some urgent work at home. Constant supervision is needed to make him work properly. On top of all this, barely an hour after he goes out to work, the wife appears almost every day at the *malik's* residence demanding the daily wages in kind for her man. She keeps waiting and nagging till she gets it, but the *malik's* wife resents it. As soon as she gets the rice the worker's wife runs down to the field to inform her husband who now slackens his pace. On occasion the latter goes home around ten in the morning to find out if his wife has got the rice.

In contrast, the migrant workers, continued Haridhan, are very hardworking. Although they get an extra half-a-rupee and an extra 400 grams of rice, some more vegetables and spices, their productivity is high enough to pay for all of it. They do not take time off so frequently, nor do they make any other fuss. No wonder then that nearly all landowners with four acres or above arrange to get some migrants during the harvesting season. That local workers are less efficient due to deteriorating nutrition is admitted by the same kisan leader. Nevertheless, he feels that under prevailing circumstances the landowners have no alternative but to import outside workers.

Although a kisan leader, Haridhan Banerji essentially puts forward the employer's point of view. The working hours are much too long. The one to two-hour break is the very minimum that one requires to work for the whole day. That Santals do it is hardly an argument. Migrants always and everywhere are obliged to work harder than the rest to justify their coming. Had there been no outside workers, it is probable that wage-rates would have risen. As much as the efficiency factor this is perhaps the major reason why landowners get outsiders.

We also enquired of persons from the poorer sections as to why there was no organized protest or strike even though the working conditions were so wretched. They gave a three-fold answer. First, the agricultural workers lacked unity among themselves. Secondly, they admitted that their efficiency had gone down due to malnutrition

over long stretches of time. Thirdly, they lacked a dynamic leader who could persuade them to remain united.

Indeed, sometime in the early 1960s a seven-day long total strike was organized by the agricultural workers. They were determined to get their wages raised and working conditions improved. But the pain of hunger was too strong. Haridhan Banerji was one of those who opposed the strike, was defied by his 'followers', but intervened again to encourage the latter to get back to work.

Up to the time of our survey no further incident took place in Karulia. In Nalhati or Mirzapur there was no organized effort by the rural poor to raise their wages or improve working conditions. Basically, their debt-slavery, namely, their abject dependence on employers for loans in order to survive through the lean months, their extremely low wages leading to uninterrupted malnutrition, and the severity of unemployment—all these factors combine to prevent the emergence of even a spontaneous, elementary trade union consciousness among them. The barriers are far more formidable than for urban workers in larger establishments who are not personally dependent upon their masters to the same degree. However, no barrier is really insurmountable, as experience of other parts of West Bengal or of Kerala, in particular, demonstrates.

Analysis of Poverty

Poverty in the broad sense must refer to the inadequacy of living conditions as against the prevailing norm in a given society at a particular point of time. Under living conditions one must include the quantities and quality of foods consumed, clothing, housing, etc. Yet the most important of all in an absolute sense is the adequacy or otherwise of calorie intake; since it is also the easiest to measure, we shall concentrate upon it. Strictly speaking, the measure relates to nourishment alone, but for the sake of brevity those who are undernourished will be called 'poor', while the 'non-poor' will refer to all those who are not undernourished.

Although a whole section of our survey schedule was devoted to food consumption the data collected are not usable. Later checks revealed that the respondents from agricultural worker families sometimes, but not always, left out the amounts consumed at the employers' premises during the working day; this led to improbably large variations in per capita consumption between families which

were otherwise similarly placed. Discarding these figures we worked out an alternative estimate of 'apparent consumption' of rice by assuming that 80 per cent of the total income of poor peasants and agricultural labour families is spent on rice alone, the remainder going into other food items, clothing, etc.

Rice requirements, on the other hand, were estimated by taking the sex-and-age structure of each family and the calorie norms for different groups as established by nutritional experts. These norms also depend on the activity pattern, the highest level being prescribed for those in 'heavy' activity; it is lower for 'medium', and still less for 'sedentary' activity. In view of considerable underemployment among the rural poor we have assumed a 'medium' activity status for all. Further, it is posited on the basis of some all-India studies that for the poorer sections two-thirds of the actual calorie intake is in the form of cereals.

In Table 8 a comparison is made between apparent consumption and requirement of rice; the shortfall, i.e. the difference between the two expressed as a percentage of the former, is also indicated. Generally, the figures in this table are in agreement with the visual observations of the survey team. However, those pertaining to the Mirzapur poor peasants are totally unrealistic; almost certainly we erred on the low side in computing their income. Ignoring this item one finds that as a group the rural poor were best off in Mirzapur and worst off in Nalhati; but the deficit in each case was substantial.

Of course, not every family in these two classes, as shown in Table 9, was below the poverty line. Among the poor peasant households out of 54 in all three villages just over one-third were actually above the poverty line; the actual ratio should have been higher if the Mirzapur figures were properly collected. Of the 86 agricultural labour households the ratio was closer to two-fifths than one-third. Once again poor peasants were not materially better off than agricultural labourers. Within the latter class there was a big disparity between the conditions of casual worker families and those of permanent or semi-permanent workers, i.e. *mahindars*, *nagares*, etc; the percentages of families below the poverty line in these two subgroups were respectively 81 and 30. These percentages would seem to suggest that poverty is intimately linked to the non-availability of work since *nagares* and *mahindars* work for most of the year at a slightly lower wage rate than casual workers who are very frequently without a job.

Orthodox economists (and other social scientists) following Malthus have often ascribed poverty to high fertility among the lower classes; persons from these classes have few distractions, worry little about the future of their progeny and keep multiplying themselves. Our survey data confirm the generally known fact that the average family size among poor peasants or agricultural labourers is considerably smaller than among the upper classes. As Table 10 shows, the upper class figures are consistently greater than the lower class averages; for the three villages combined the gap is as much as one-half. Thus our evidence leads us to reject the hypothesis that excessive breeding among the poor peasants or agricultural labourers lies at the core of the poverty question.

On the other hand, it would be dogmatic to deny that the largeness of family size can in some cases aggravate poverty. Simple logic tells us that at given levels of aggregate family income a larger family implies a lower income per head, irrespective of the class to which the family belongs. However, the aggregate income is rarely fixed; usually it increases, though not necessarily at the same rate, as family size goes up. In order to capture the joint effect of these two variables on the lower classes one may use the ratio of the number of earners to family size (E/P). Of course, not all earners can be on the same footing, for the duration of gainful occupation as well as earning rates vary a great deal; nevertheless the E/P ratio does convey some useful information when it is applied to relatively homogeneous groups. Such an exercise is attempted in Table 11 where the average E/P ratio for the poor is compared to that for the non-poor; similarly, average family sizes within these subgroups are also contrasted. The common sense premise that E/P ratio should be higher for the non-poor than for the poor is consistently upheld in the case of each subgroup in every village. On the other hand, the family size hypothesis, namely that the poor should have a larger size than the non-poor, is rather mildly supported. It is refuted in the case of casual agricultural labourers (except in Mirzapur), but appears plausible for the other groups. Even then the differences between the family sizes of the poor and non-poor among the *mahindars*, *nagares*, etc., or among the poor peasants, are quite significant.

One may then conclude that it is not so much the numbers within a family but rather the work opportunities available to its able-bodied members and the E/P ratio which are the more important determinants

TABLE 8: Fortnightly Requirement and Apparent Consumption of Rice per Family (in kilograms)

	<i>Nalhati</i>		<i>Mirzapur</i>		<i>Karulia</i>	
	<i>Poor peasant</i>	<i>Agricultural labourer</i>	<i>Poor peasant</i>	<i>Agricultural labourer</i>	<i>Poor peasant</i>	<i>Agricultural labourer</i>
Requirement	34.5	27.2	36.3	33.3	35.3	29.4
Apparent consumption	26.5	21.3	20.9	26.2	28.5	24.0
Deficit (%)	-30	-28	-74	-16	-24	-22

TABLE 9: Incidence of Poverty among Families from the Lower Classes

	<i>Nalhati</i>	<i>Mirzapur</i>	<i>Karulia</i>	<i>All villages</i>
1. Poor peasants: number	26	8	20	54
a) Proportion of the poor	0.73	0.63	0.55	0.65
2. Agricultural labourers: number	32	13	41	86
a) Proportion of the poor	0.69	0.54	0.58	0.62
3. Casual agricultural labourers	19	5	29	53
a) Proportion of the poor	0.90	0.80	0.76	0.81
4. Mahindars, nagares, etc.: number	13	8	12	33
a) Proportion of the poor	0.39	0.38	0.17	0.30

TABLE 10: Average Family Size for Different Classes

	<i>Nalhati</i>	<i>Mirzapur</i>	<i>Karulia</i>	<i>All villages</i>
1. All classes	5.8	6.4	6.4	6.3
2. Upper classes	7.4	7.2	8.0	7.6
3. Lower classes	5.2	4.8	5.4	5.2

of poverty. Both these factors depend to a considerable extent upon the wider macroeconomic environment, in particular, the rate of expansion of jobs within the region/country.

Before concluding this part a word about the rationing system may not be out of context. Firstly, the supply of foodgrains in the fair price shops in this rice surplus region was extremely inadequate and highly erratic. One did not always know when supplies would come.

TABLE 11: Analysis of Poverty among Families from the Lower Classes: The E/P Ratio and Family Size

	<i>Nalhati</i>	<i>Mirzapur</i>	<i>Karulia</i>	<i>All villages</i>
1. Casual labourers				
a) E/P ratio: poor	0.49	0.19	0.49	0.45
b) E/P ratio: non-poor	0.63	0.25	0.74	0.68
c) Family size: poor	3.8	6.5	4.7	4.5
d) Family size: non-poor	4.0	4.0	5.0	4.7
2. Mahindars, nagares, etc.				
a) E/P ratio: poor	0.38	0.45	0.36	0.40
b) E/P ratio: non-poor	0.45	0.55	0.60	0.54
c) Family size: poor	5.8	6.7	5.5	6.0
d) Family size: non-poor	5.3	4.0	5.0	4.9
3. Poor peasants				
a) E/P ratio: poor	0.39	0.26	0.30	0.35
b) E/P ratio: non-poor	0.45	0.55	0.45	0.46
c) Family size: poor	6.2	3.8	7.3	6.2
d) Family size: non-poor	6.0	3.8	6.2	5.8

Note: E/P ratio = ratio of earners to total population, i.e. earners and non-earners.

Secondly, the labouring poor very often kept their ration cards with the shopowners who gave them small quantities either gratis or on loan from time to time. Short of cash the former could not usually pay for the supplies when these were available; on such occasions the shopowners lifted the rations on their behalf and sold the quantum of rice or wheat in the free market. The rationing system in the villages thus brought only marginal comfort to the poor, but became a source of considerable earnings for the privileged dealers. Hence a simple extension of rationing facilities without any accompanying measures to augment the cash income of the poor or some system of wage advance in the form of cereals by some public agency is unlikely to make a dent in the situation. The elements of the present socio-economic and political structure are so closely interlocked that the problem of hunger defies a solution along purely humanitarian lines.

Education and Literacy

The educational scene in our sample villages reflects some of the fundamental issues confronting the country as a whole. While the overall literacy rate is low, the inter-class differences are extremely

sharp. Despite the existence of a primary school in each of the three villages education has hardly permeated into the lower classes. The upper segments, however, are well ahead.

According to the Census of 1971, the literacy rate, i.e. the proportion of literates to the entire population, was rather low at 37 and 31 per cent respectively in the two mouzas of Nalhati and Karulia. For men these were somewhat higher at 47 and 38 respectively; but for women the rates were only 29 and 26 per cent. Our survey tells a different story; the results are summarized in Table 12. In the mouza

TABLE 12: *Education and Literacy*

	<i>Proportion of adults, 15 years or above, who were literate</i>		<i>Proportion of all children, 6-14 years, who were completed primary school</i>		<i>Proportion of all children, 6-14 years, who were completed secondary school</i>		<i>Proportion of all children, 6-14 years, who were attending school</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>All Classes</i>								
Nalhati	39	18	26	9	4	1	43	43
Mirzapur	79	56	73	34	20	1	76	74
Karulia	53	35	46	26	18	2	50	39
All villages	57	37	49	24	15	1	55	50
<i>Upper Classes</i>								
Nalhati	91	45	71	23	11	2	68	78
Mirzapur	93	63	88	38	27	2	90	85
Karulia	89	59	80	44	32	3	86	71
All villages	91	59	82	38	27	2	84	78
<i>Poor Peasants</i>								
Nalhati	15	2	2	2	0	0	33	13
Mirzapur	67	37	42	25	0	0	40	25
Karulia	10	3	3	3	0	0	4	6
All villages	19	6	7	5	0	0	20	10
<i>Agricultural Labourers</i>								
Nalhati	12	3	5	0	0	0	27	11
Mirzapur	9	12	9	12	0	0	10	8
Karulia	6	0	4	0	0	0	8	0
All villages	9	3	5	2	0	0	17	5

Note: In the 6-14 year age-group there were 7 girls from the upper classes and 3 boys and 2 girls from the lower classes who were literate but not attending school; these numbers are for all the three villages.

of Nalhati the overall literacy rate is much higher at 48 per cent, but that in Karulia is also higher at 26 per cent. For the two mouzas together the Census rate is 35 per cent as against our survey rate of 44 per cent.

Instead of looking at the aggregate it will be more useful to look at the situation separately for different age-groups and classes and the two sexes as in Table 12. For adult men, i.e. those of 15 years or more, in all three villages the percentage of literacy is above 90 for the upper classes, but only 19 for poor peasants and 9 for agricultural labourers. Among the male literates from the upper classes only one-tenth had failed to complete the primary stage, while nearly a third had finished high school or college. On the other hand, out of the male literates among the poor peasants a bare third had completed primary education, and none stayed to the end of high school; among the agricultural labourers the situation was basically similar, though more than half of the literates completed the primary stage.

The picture for women in the three villages taken together is more dismal all round. Among the adults the literacy rates are 59, 6 and 3 per cent for the upper classes, poor peasants and agricultural labourers respectively. Of the literates from the first group the proportions completing the primary and secondary levels were 64 and 3 per cent respectively. None of the women from the last two groups stayed to the end of secondary school, but most of the literates among them had finished the primary stage.

Looking at the school-age children from 5 to 14 years the sex-differential is very low for the upper classes; 84 per cent of males and 78 per cent of females of this age-group from these classes were attending school. By contrast these percentages for males and females respectively were as low as 20 and 10 for poor peasants, and 17 and 5 for agricultural labourers.

That the existing school system barely caters to the needs of the children from the economically weaker sections can be easily established. School-age children from poor peasant and agricultural labour families constituted 18 and 23 per cent respectively of the total; yet only 10 per cent, equally divided between these classes, of the total school-going population came from their midst.

A comparison of the literacy rate among the adults and the proportion of school-age children attending school should indicate the *future* trend in adult literacy rates. The latter should rise (fall) if the first of the two observed ratios is lower (higher) than the second. By

this yardstick, among the upper classes there is unlikely to be any improvement for men; for women there is a definite positive trend. Among poor peasants there should be some rise in the adult literacy rate for both sexes in Nalhati, a significant deterioration for both sexes in Mirzapur, and rather marginal changes in Karulia. As for agricultural labourers there should be some improvements in Nalhati and imperceptible changes in Mirzapur or Karulia. It is remarkable that there is no literate woman among the Karulia agricultural labourers nor anyone going to school.

Lastly, the inter-village educational differences are worth noting. For the upper classes as well as for the agricultural labourers, there is hardly any such difference except that the agricultural labourers of Nalhati alone seem to be on the road to a better, but by no means satisfactory, future. The poor peasants had a status close to that of the upper classes in Mirzapur; elsewhere the former are as badly off as the agricultural labourers. On the whole, 'progressive' Karulia appears to offer fewer educational opportunities for the lower classes than the other two villages, and Mirzapur, least inegalitarian of the three, is also most advanced educationally.

Coming to some broader issues one can establish that the existing primary, and *a fortiori*, secondary school system barely caters to the needs of the children from the exploited classes. While school-age children from poor peasant and agricultural labour families accounted for 41 per cent of the total, only 10 per cent of the school-going children came from their ranks. Of course, it would be foolhardy to generalize on the basis of just three villages, but the casual impressions that we have gathered from other parts of West Bengal on this issue are not very different. The Directive Principle of the Indian Constitution regarding universal primary education seems to have been put into practice for the upper classes alone in rural areas.

It is not the paucity of state expenditure that explains the situation. The difficulties lie elsewhere. Distress obliges children from the poorer sections to search for jobs as cowboys, etc., but then only 13 of them in our survey were gainfully employed as against 231 who were of school-going age but did not attend school. It is more likely that these sections do not perceive any potential benefits from schooling. There may equally be some processes at work in primary schools or in society as a whole discouraging poorer children from attending school. A more thorough study is needed to identify such processes.

Conditions for Knowledge of Working-Class Conditions: Employers, Government and the Jute Workers of Calcutta, 1890-1940*

DIPESH CHAKRABARTY

I

At the heart of this essay are two rather general propositions: first, that the ruling-class documents often used for historical reconstructions of working-class conditions can be read both for what they say and for their 'silences'; and secondly, that an attempt to understand their silences cannot stop at the purely economic explanation—though the economic is undoubtedly important—but has to push itself into the realm of working-class culture. It will also be claimed here that in arguing thus we are arguing with Marx and not against him.

The discussion in the first volume of Marx's *Capital* raises the possibility of a relationship between the day-to-day running of capitalism and the production of a body of knowledge about working-class conditions. Marx in fact presents us with the elements of a possible theoretical approach to the problem. Even at the risk of appearing to digress a bit, it may be worthwhile to go over that theoretical ground once again, as the rest of this essay will examine one particular working-class history—that of the Calcutta jute mill workers between 1890 and 1940—in the light of Marx's discussion. Perhaps it should also be emphasized that what we are borrowing here from Marx is essentially an *argument*. Marx used the English case to illustrate his ideas but the specifics of English history are not a

* This essay owes a great deal to discussions with Imran Ali, Katherine Gibson, Ranajit Guha, Stephen Henningham, Anthony Low and Roger Stuart. I am, however, solely responsible for any errors of fact or judgement.

concern of this essay. We are not reading Marx as a historian of England and this is not an exercise in comparative history.

As is well known, Marx used the documents of the English state for the wealth of detail they usually offered on the living and working conditions of the English proletariat. But Marx also noted in the process that the English state's interest in closely monitoring the conditions of labour had an extremely useful role to play in the development of English capitalism. 'This industrial revolution which takes place spontaneously', wrote Marx, 'is artificially helped on by the extension of the Factory Acts to all industries in which women, young persons and children are employed'.¹ This the Acts achieved in two important ways. First, they sought to make 'the conditions of competition' between different factories uniform: Marx referred in his discussion of the Factory Acts to the 'cry of the capitalists for equality in the conditions of competition, i.e. for equal restraint on all exploitation of labour'. Secondly, by regulating 'the working day as regards its length, pauses, beginning and end'—that is, by making 'the saving of time a necessity'—they 'forced into existence' more developed and complex machinery and hence, by implication, a more efficient working class.²

For the Factory Acts to secure these aims, however, the state needed to ensure that the knowledge generated by the administration of the Acts was not influenced by the narrower considerations of any particular industrialist. Individual masters, it is true, were often in 'fanatical opposition' to the Acts. But the very fact that Marx derived many of his details of the 'cruelties' of early capitalism directly from factory 'inspectors' reports speaks of the 'political will' that the English state was capable of mustering, the will that allowed it to distance itself from particular capitalists and yet serve English capitalism in general.³

Marx's discussion clarifies some of the conditions for this success. The 'political will' of the English state did not fall from the skies. While Marx did see the Factory Acts as 'that first and meagre concession wrung from capital' by the government and the working people, he also noted that important sections of English industrialists were in fact themselves in favour of the Factory Acts, their humanistic

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, I (Moscow, n.d.), p. 474.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 474, 476-9, 490.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 480, 482-4.

impulses often spurred on by the forces of competition. Competition was the key to the demand for 'equal restraint on all exploitation of labour'. 'Messrs. Cooksley of Bristol, nail and chain, &c., manufacturers', Marx noted, '*spontaneously* introduced the regulations of the Factory Act into their business' (emphasis added). The Children's Employment Commission of the 1860s explained why: 'As the old irregular system prevails in neighbouring works, the Messrs. Cooksley are subject to the disadvantage of having their boys enticed to continue their labour elsewhere after 6 p.m.' Marx also gave the instance of one 'Mr. J. Simpson (paper box and bag maker, London)' who told the Commission that 'he would sign any petition for it [legislative interference]. . . .' Summarizing such cases, the Commission said:

It would be unjust to the larger employers that their factories should be placed under regulation, while the hours of labour in the smaller places in their own branch of business were under no legislative restriction. . . . Further, a stimulus would be given to the multiplication of the smaller places of work, which are almost invariably the least favourable to the health, comfort, education, and general improvement of people.⁴

Even if competition in the economy is regarded as instrumental to the autonomy of the English state, one still has to explain however why the factories, in the first place, produced the necessary documents without the state having to do much policing. Marx's answer lies in his discussion of the industrial discipline that the capitalist system of manufacture involved. In the process of the 'disciplining' of the labour force, the interests of the individual capitalists and those of the state meshed, since, in England, the pressure towards discipline arose both from within and without the factory. If one effect of the factory legislation was to produce 'uniformity, regularity, order and economy' within 'each individual workshop',⁵ these were also produced internally, according to Marx, by the capitalist division of labour: 'continuity, uniformity, regularity, order . . .' are also the words that Marx used to describe discipline.⁶

Discipline, in Marx's discussion, had two components. It entailed a 'technical subordination of the workman to the uniform motion of the instruments of labour'; hence the need for training, education,

⁴ Ibid., pp. 488-91.

⁵ Ibid., p. 503.

⁶ Ibid., p. 345.

etc. Secondly, it made supervision—‘the labour of overlooking’—an integral part of capitalist relations of production. The supervisor or foreman was the executor of the ‘private legislation’ of capital, the ‘factory code in which capital formulates . . . his autocracy over his workpeople’. The supervisor thus embodied the authority of capital, and documents representing factory rules and legislation—e.g. attendance registers, finebooks, timesheets—became both symbols and instruments of his authority. Supervision, so crucial to the working of capitalist authority, was thus based on documents and produced documents in turn. In Marx’s words:

The place of the slave-driver’s lash is taken by the overlooker’s book of penalties. All punishments [in capitalist production relations] *naturally* resolve themselves into fines and deductions from wages (emphasis added).⁷

The every-day functioning of the capitalist factory, therefore, produced documents, hence knowledge, about working-class conditions. This was so because capitalist relations of production employed a system of supervision—another name for surveillance—that, in the language of Michel Foucault, ‘insidiously objectified those on whom it is applied’.⁸ It was thus in the nature of capitalist authority that it operated by forming ‘a body of knowledge’ about its subjects. In this it was different from, say, pre-capitalist domination which worked more by deploying ‘the ostentatious signs of sovereignty’ and could do without a knowledge of the dominated.⁹

In pursuing Marx’s ideas on the relationship between industrial discipline and documentation of the conditions of workers, we thus end up with the notion of ‘authority’. Marx was quite clear that the supervisor represented the disciplinary authority of capital over labour; but ‘authority’, in Marx’s hands, was never a one-sided affair. Quite early in his discussion on capital, Marx wrote: ‘A . . . cannot be “your majesty” to B, unless at the same time majesty in B’s eyes assumes the bodily form of A . . .’.¹⁰ Or a few pages later:

Such expressions of relations in general, called by Hegel reflex-categories, form a very curious class. For instance, one man is King only because

⁷ Ibid., pp. 423-4.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth, 1979), p. 220.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

other men stand in the relation of subjects to him. They, on the contrary, imagine that they are subjects because he is a king.¹¹

A particular form of authority or a system of power, then, implies a particular cultural formation. In Marx's exposition of 'capital' as a category, it is quite evident that the figure of the worker invoked was that of a person who could be produced only by a society where the bourgeois notion of equality (before the law or the market) was ingrained in culture. Marx saw labour as a 'moment' (that is, a constituent element) of capital, and capital 'is a *bourgeois production relation*, a production relation of bourgeois society'.¹² The labourer of Marx's assumption had internalized and enjoyed 'formal freedom', the freedom of the contract (which brought legal and market relations together), and he enjoyed this not just in abstraction but as 'the individual, real person'.¹³ Until this was ensured and so long as pre-capitalist, particularistic ties made up and characterized the relations of production, capital, as Marx understood it, was 'not yet *capital as such*'.¹⁴ This is why Marx thought that the logic of capital could be best deciphered only in a society where 'the notion of human equality has already acquired the fixity of a popular prejudice'¹⁵ and hence chose the historical case of England as the one most illustrative of his argument.

Indeed, as we now know from historians of our times, the 'notion of equality before the law' was an essential ingredient of the culture with which the English working class entered and handled its

¹¹ Ibid., p. 57, n. 1

¹² Marx quoted in Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'* (London, 1980), p. 184, footnote 3. Emphasis in the original. For Marx's conception of labour as a 'moment of capital', see his *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Harmondsworth, 1974), pp. 293–301. *Capital*, I, p. 333, sees labour as a 'mode of existence of capital'. *Hegel's Logic* (tr. W. Wallace; London, 1975), pp. 79, 113, uses 'moment' to mean both 'stage' as well as a (constituent) 'factor'. Jindrich Zeleny, *The Logic of Marx* (Oxford, 1980), p. xi, defines 'moment' as 'one of the elements of a complex conceptual entity'.

¹³ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 464.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 296–7. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵ Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 60. Admittedly, Marx made this statement with reference to the problem of deciphering the 'secret of the expression of value'. But then one has to remember that for Marx capital is self-expanding value and labour a moment of capital. For these and related points also see I. I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (Montreal, 1975).

experience of the Industrial Revolution.¹⁶ It is this working class that is present—though only as an assumption—in Marx's discussion of the disciplinary authority of capital that the act of supervision embodies. If our exposition of Marx's ideas is correct then it would mean that such authority was rooted as much in the factory codes that capital legislated out of its own needs as in the culture of the working class over whom the authority was exercised. The point seems important even in another respect. By assuming a particular kind of culture on the part of the worker, Marx assigns the working class a place—an active presence, in fact—in the whole process of disciplining by supervision and record-keeping. And this he does, not just for moments of protest when the working class is obviously active and shows its will, but even when it does not protest and is seemingly a passive object of documentation and knowledge.

For a historian of the jute mill workers of Calcutta, the relevance of all this is immediate. Any projected history of the conditions of this working class is soon bedevilled by the problem of paucity of sources. True, some of this scarcity of documents can be explained by the characteristics of the Bengali intelligentsia who never produced social investigators like, for instance, Henry Mayhew.¹⁷ Some of it may also be explained by the non-literate nature of the working class. A problem still remains. What puzzles is the relative poverty of information in the documents of the state—especially documents that needed the co-operation of capital, the factory inspectors' reports, for instance—which compare rather badly with the apparent richness of similar English documents that Marx put to such effective use in the first volume of *Capital*.

Marx's argument could then be used as a measure of how different capitalism in colonial Bengal was from the one described by him. There is yet another question that Marx's argument helps us raise. The Calcutta jute mill workers, being mostly migrant peasants from Bihar and UP, did not have a culture characterized by any ingrained notion of 'human equality' and were thus very unlike the workers of Marx's assumption. Their's was largely a pre-capitalist, inegalitarian culture marked by strong primordial loyalties of community,

¹⁶ The classic statement is in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 213.

¹⁷ Cf. my article, 'Sasipada Banerjee: A Study in the Nature of the First Contact of the Bengali Bhadrakok with the Working Classes of Bengal', *The Indian Historical Review*, Jan. 1976.

language, religion, caste and kinship.¹⁸ Since, in Marx's argument, the question of documentation of conditions of work within a factory was linked to the problem of 'disciplinary authority', and that in turn was linked to the question of working-class culture, the cultural differences of the Calcutta working class raise a whole series of problems. Were relations of production within a Calcutta jute mill still characterized (in spite of differences in working-class culture) by the disciplinary authority that Marx described? The answer would appear to be in the negative. What then was the nature of 'supervision' in a Calcutta jute mill? Did it behave like a huge apparatus documenting the conditions of labour? Did it have a bearing on the problem that a historian of the working class faces today: paucity of 'sources'?

The following sections will pursue these questions. This essay aims at two objectives. It aspires to draw a picture, however incomplete, of the conditions of the jute mill workers of Calcutta in the period mentioned. At the same time, it also intends to account for the gaps in our knowledge and argues that the gaps are as revealing of working-class conditions as any direct reference to them. It is thus a history both of our knowledge and of our ignorance. And the explanation offered here is both political-economic and cultural.

II

Government interest in working-class conditions in India is of relatively recent origin. It was only after the end of the First World War that the conditions of the Indian working class became an object of knowledge for the Government of India. A Labour Bureau was set up in May 1920 'to collect all available information on labour conditions in India, and classify and tabulate it'.¹⁹ One important factor contributing to this development was the establishment of the International Labour Office (I.L.O.) immediately after the war. The Indian government had been an 'active participant' in the process of the I.L.O.'s formation and was pledged to its goals.²⁰ A second important factor was one internal to the Indian political scene. The conclusion

¹⁸ See my 'Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal's Jute Mill-Hands in the 1890s', *Past and Present*, May 1981.

¹⁹ *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India* (London, 1931; hereafter R.C.L.I.), vol. V, pt. I, p. 327.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, and West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta (hereafter W.B.S.A.), Com[merce] Dept. Com [merce] Br[anch], Apr. 1922, A5-9.

of the war and the subsequent period of nationalist agitation had seen trade unions mushroom all over the country on a scale previously unknown. This was accompanied by a countrywide outburst of labour unrest. With the Russian revolution still fresh in its memory, the Government of India's reaction to these developments was coloured by a fear of Bolshevism.²¹ 'Labour is growing more conscious of its own wants and power', the government warned its provincial heads in 1919, '[and] it is showing signs of a capacity for organization'.²² By its militancy, thus, labour was drawing upon itself the gaze of the government.

What distinguished this new outlook on labour from the traditional law-and-order view of the state was a desire to reform the conditions of labour and thus change the nature of the working class. In an impressive range of labour legislation considered (and partly enacted) in the twenties and afterwards, the Government of India sought to take a direct role in structuring the situation of the working classes. The amended Factories Act (1922), the Workmen's Compensation Act (1923), the Trade Unions Act (1926), the Trade Disputes Act (1928), the Maternity Benefits Bill (1929), the Payment of Wages Act (1933), etc., were all aimed at creating a working class different from the traditionally-held image of the industrial labour force in India. The worker was henceforth to receive a new 'legal' personality, more welfare, and even some official help to organize into trade unions (naturally, of a non-communist kind). Introducing a bill for the 'registration and protection of trade unions', the Government of India wrote to the local governments in September 1921 that 'in so far as the [trade union] movement makes for the organization of labour, and for the steady betterment of the conditions of labour . . . every facility should be offered for its development along healthy lines'.²³

The government's concern for a 'steady betterment of the conditions of labour' was sustained and animated by a recently-acquired vision of a burgeoning industrial growth in India. The war had left the government in a 'developmentalist' mood²⁴ from which sprang the arguments regarding working-class conditions.

²¹ See for example W.B.S.A., Home Political (hereafter Poll.) Confidential (hereafter Confdl.) 405(1-3)/1919.

²² W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Nov. 1919, A11-25.

²³ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Aug. 1922, A32-51.

²⁴ See Clive Dewey, 'The Government of India's "New Industrial Policy", 1900-1925: Formation and Failure' in K. N. Chaudhuri and C. J. Dewey (eds), *Economy and Society: Essays in Indian Economic and Social History* (Delhi, 1979), pp. 215-57.

There are indications of a considerable expansion in the near future in the number and size of industrial establishments. Moreover machinery and power are being employed in factories to a much larger extent than . . . before. Mines are being worked at greater depths. . . . The transport industries are developing.

With these words the government pleaded in August 1921 the case for creating a system of rules for compensations to be awarded to workmen injured in accidents in the course of work.²⁵ The argument was elaborated during the discussion that followed. The Government of India explained that the 'growing complexity of industry . . . with the increasing use of machinery' required a more efficient labour force than had hitherto been available. It was therefore 'advisable that they [the workers] should be protected . . . from hardship arising from accidents', because this would not only increase 'the available supply of labour' but also produce 'a corresponding increase in the efficiency of the average workman. . . .'²⁶

'Efficiency', in this logic, was a function of working-class conditions. The government noted in 1919 that while there was 'a keen and increasing demand for factory labour' in India, there was 'little apparent desire on the part of the labourers to increase their efficiency', and—more to the point—'little prospect of their being able to do so under present conditions' [emphasis added].²⁷ Improving efficiency meant improving these 'conditions', and they included not only 'education, housing and social welfare' but also such aspects as the 'comfort' and 'spare time' of the worker.

The efficiency of workers is closely connected with their education, and their standard of comfort; the shortening of hours may not prove an unmixed good, if the workers are not put in a position to make a proper use of their spare time.²⁸

The argument was broader than it might appear at first sight. For it was not only a question of giving the workers 'spare time', but of structuring that 'spare time' as well, of ensuring that the workers made 'proper use' of it.²⁹ It was thus that the government's eyes fell—for the first time in Indian history—on several aspects of the

²⁵ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., July 1922, A34-72.

²⁶ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Jan. 1923, A65-107. Emphasis added.

²⁷ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Nov. 1919, A11-25.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See also W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., May 1927, A1-6.

worker's life that had so far been held to be beyond the ken of capital. Issues of indebtedness, the 'monetary reserve' of the worker, his wages, food, health, home life—all came under the scrutiny of the government.³⁰ 'Efficiency' produced its own code of ethics which opposed the image of the vigorous and healthy worker to that of the overworked and fatigued.

They [the Government of India] believe that the longer interval [of rest] is desirable in order to enable the worker to maintain his *vigour*, and that its enforcement should ultimately prove beneficial to the employer. There are grounds for believing that the absence of sustained work, characteristic of many factory employees in this country, has been due . . . to the fact that the hours fixed did not in the past allow sufficient opportunity for the *rest* necessary to prevent fatigue.³¹

It was only in the context of this search for an 'efficient' working class that working-class conditions became an object of knowledge. How did the Government of India propose to produce and gather this knowledge? Provincial governments were equipped with new departments meant to perform this task. For instance, under pressure from the Government of India, the Bengal Government established in July 1920 an office of the Industrial Intelligence Officer, later named the Labour Intelligence Officer, whose duty it was to 'maintain a proper watch over the industrial situation', and 'in particular to investigate and report on labour conditions and the facts and causes of labour disturbances'.³² The Government of India also realized that much of this knowledge would have to be generated within the factories and that the provincial staff of factory inspectors might be employed to collect and monitor the information. Since 'leisure', 'rest', 'fatigue', 'sparetime', etc., were some of the key concepts supporting the government's notion of 'efficiency', control over the labourer's working hours naturally emerged as a problem of the highest importance. It is in this context that attendance registers maintained by individual factories and the factory inspectors' reports came to be regarded as crucial documents from the Government of India's point of view. With this end in view, the Factories Act was amended in 1922 with a new section 35 now requiring the manager of

³⁰ See for instance W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Feb. 1927, A1-8, and May 1929, B196-9.

³¹ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Mar. 1924, A45-61. Emphasis added.

³² W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Apr. 1922, A5-9.

a factory 'to maintain . . . [an attendance] register of all persons employed and of their hours of work . . .'.³³

III

The conditions of jute mill labour in Bengal never fully received the documentation that the Government of India had arranged to give them. In other words, the desired knowledge was not produced. The inaccuracies in the attendance registers of the jute mills were witness to this failure, for, as the Chief Inspector of Factories admitted to the Royal Commission on Labour, 'the records given in such registers do not represent the true conditions . . . of . . . labour'.³⁴ The Labour Office of Bengal, too, suffered from a peculiar bureaucratic malaise, the history of which only shows that the Bengal Government never shared the Government of India's eagerness for knowledge of labour conditions. For one thing, as the Labour Commissioner of Bengal recalled in 1935, the office was set up with 'no immediate purpose of having a large investigating office, with cost of living indices and other standard concomitants of an organised labour office'.³⁵ Besides, so low was the priority of this office in the eyes of the Bengal Government that 'when the first Retrenchment Committee' reported in 1921, 'the Labour Office seemed bound to go'; but 'instead of abolishing it, the [Bengal] government changed its character'. To economize, the Labour Intelligence Officer was saddled with various responsibilities and his investigative functions suffered badly in consequence. He was placed 'in charge of the Commerce Department, and later of the Marine Department [as well]'. He was made responsible for the administration of all the labour laws that were to come in the twenties, as well as for other legislative measures only 'partly concerned with the welfare of labour, e.g., the Boilers Act and the Electricity Act'. The Labour Intelligence Officer thus became, in his own words, 'an ordinary secretariat officer' who had little time to investigate the conditions of labour.

With the growing volume of office work and the addition of one duty after another, the Labour Intelligence Officer found it impossible to continue his personal investigations regarding every strike, and also to some extent,

³³ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Feb. 1926, A1-46.

³⁴ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 92.

³⁵ W.B.S.A., Home Poll. Confdl. No. 392(1-3)/1935.

his visits to factories ...; although, as far as possible, he continued these visits up to 1929 when the enormous increase of work due to the advent of Whitley Commission tied him completely to his desk.³⁶

The atrophy of the Labour Office was not a matter of simple bureaucratic mindlessness. What calls for an analysis is precisely the 'mind' of this bureaucracy. To this 'mind', any interest in labour conditions beyond that called for by the immediate needs of capital or of law and order, was suspect. 'For some peculiar reason', wrote a rather frustrated Labour Commissioner in 1935, 'in Bengal, interest in labour matters or desire for knowledge of labour developments is read as sympathy for the labour point of view.'³⁷

The 'reason' for this suspicion is not difficult to analyse. The Government of India's 'desire for knowledge of labour developments' assumed that the investigating authority would be capable of maintaining a degree of independence from the point of view of particular capitalists. The government desired to stand above the 'unevenness' of such particular views. For example, in insisting on 'uniform rules' for fines or accident-compensations, the Government of India argued that the question of 'welfare of the working classes' could not 'any longer be left to the uneven generosity of employers'.³⁸ Such 'neutrality' of the state, however, threatened to rupture the almost 'natural' unity that had existed in Bengal for years between the provincial government and owners of capital (especially those represented by powerful organizations such as the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and the Indian Jute Mills Association).

This 'natural unity' received its fullest expression in the nineteenth century when the moral order of the day was unashamedly pro-capitalist and when the Government of Bengal plainly considered it its duty 'to do all it can to afford moral support to the [jute] mill-owners' in the face of labour unrest.³⁹ In those years even the meagre provisions of the first two Factories Acts of India were seen by senior officers of the Government of Bengal as 'needlessly harassing to the [mill] managers'.⁴⁰ A factory inspector who once insisted on age-

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., July 1922, A34-72.

³⁹ W.B.S.A., Judicial Dept. Police Br., Jan. 1896, A6-11.

⁴⁰ W.B.S.A., General (hereafter Genl.) Dept. Miscellaneous (hereafter Misc.) Br., July 1882, A73-81.

verification for all jute-mill child-workers in his jurisdiction was sharply pulled up by the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal. ‘Inspectors’, he was told, ‘by making the [medical] examination of every child compulsory, would give to owners or managers of factories the maximum of trouble, and to the government the maximum of expenses without conferring any compensating benefit on the majority of the children employed’.⁴¹

It would not be very profitable to see this merely as an instance of ruling-class hypocrisy. The evidence yields more value when treated as an expression of the ruling-class outlook on conditions of labour. The Bengal officials were not just displaying their lack of respect for the factory laws; underlying their statements was also the conviction that the labour conditions themselves did not leave much to be desired. To most of the factory inspectors, therefore—contrary to the aims of the factory legislation—the conditions always seemed satisfactory. A typical example is the report of the working of the Factories Act in Bengal for the year 1893. The ‘general conditions of the [mill] operatives’ were found ‘very satisfactory’, the coolie-lines were ‘well laid out’, their work ‘not arduous’, the water supply ‘good’, the latrines ‘well kept’, the children ‘thoroughly healthy’ and their work ‘in no way detrimental to them’, and arrangements for the workers’ medical care ‘satisfactory’. Even the ‘fact’ that ‘five or ten per cent’ of the children were ‘weak, feeble in growth and stunted for their age’ could not be attributed, it was said, ‘to the work they perform in the mills, as about the same proportion of undersized and weakly children may be observed among the outside population’.⁴²

To such an official ‘mind’, labour conditions deserved investigation only when they posed law and order problems. A Government of Bengal file discussing a sudden outburst of working-class unrest in the jute mills in 1894-5 gave some attention to the question of housing for labour. But this attention was merely bestowed for reasons of control and no more. The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal welcomed the IJMA (Indian Jute Mills Association) to ‘co-operate with the [Bengal] Government in improving both direct control [i.e. policing] over the mill-hands in case they should break into violence, and also indirect control which will make acts of violence less likely by *bettering the conditions* of the employees’:

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² W.B.S.A., Genl. Dept. Misc. Br., Aug. 1893, A1-36.

His Honor therefore confidently invites the co-operation of the mill-owners to provide comfortable and well-ordered homes for mill-hands, and thus avoid such conditions as those at Samnagar and Titanagar, which offer temptations to the disorderly and make control difficult.⁴³

But the amount of improvement desired in the 'conditions' was severely limited. Too much 'bettering' of conditions might make the task of control harder. 'Rice is very cheap, and this makes them [the labourers] independent', was the diagnosis of a police officer in the same file, who quoted jute mill managers' views in support of his own: 'Experienced mill managers seem to think that . . . when the labour market becomes once more over-stocked, as they say it will be, mill hands will grow less independent, and matters will quiet down to their normal state.'⁴³ In taking a law and order view of labour conditions, then, the state just reproduced the point of view of capital.

Much of this nineteenth-century spirit can be read off twentieth-century documents as well, especially those coming from the years before the First World War. There was for instance the Civil Surgeon of Serampore who thought (in 1909) that 'the mills in Hooghly need no legislation for the well-being of the operatives'; or the factory inspector who felt (in 1910) that 'an Inspector' was 'legitimately entitled to place the telescope to his blind eye' if he came across 'a child of seven or eight years sewing or mending a gunny bag in the vicinity of the mother', even though the law demanded 'the Manager . . . be prosecuted for employing a child under nine'; or there was the even more striking case of C. A. Walsh, the Chief Inspector of Factories, boldly declaring in 1912: 'I see no poverty in the quarters surrounding the great [jute] mills in Khardah, Titagarh, Shamnagore, Kankinare, Naihati, Budge-Budge or Fort Gloster. . . .'⁴⁴

The tone of official pronouncements changed somewhat after 1920, thanks to the efforts of the Government of India and of nationalist and radical politicians who espoused the cause of labour. 'The increasing solidarity of labour' entered the calculations of the Government of Bengal and the realization dawned that 'industrial disputes will in future form an integral part of the industrial life of this province'.⁴⁵ Yet this did not bring about any 'epistemological

⁴³ W.B.S.A., Judicial Dept. Police Br., Jan. 1896, A6-11.

⁴⁴ W.B.S.A., Genl. Dept. Misc. Br., Aug. 1910, A33-86; Aug. 1911, A18-63; and Medical Dept. Medical Br., Jan. 1914, B287-95.

⁴⁵ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Dec. 1923, A8.

shift' in the status of the 'conditions of labour' question. It never acquired any priority over the question of control. The Industrial Unrest Committee of 1921 recommended that the Bengal Government set up some means for investigating strikes but made it clear that the means proposed 'must be designed for the purpose of alleviating unrest . . . rather than for a detailed investigation of current labour conditions'.⁴⁶ It was the same 'disease' that had warped the career of the Labour Office in Bengal. The periodic reports the Labour Intelligence Officer sent up to the Government of India were, it was admitted, 'nearly always' the views of the local police—'merely thana officers' views', as Donald Gladding, a senior official of the Bengal Government, once described them. 'Neither superior police officers nor Magistrates go about seriously to find out the truth by questioning the workmen on the one hand and the employers on the other—and this', Gladding insisted, was 'polite and correct'.

The factory inspectors' reports bore ample testimony to this absence of a spirit of investigation. A good example is the treatment that the question of the 'health' of the workers received in these reports. This was an important question from the Government of India's point of view, carrying obvious implications for the dietary conditions, the standard of living, the wages situation and finally the efficiency of the worker.⁴⁷ None of these latter considerations, however, ever influenced the Bengal factory inspectors. For years, their reports carried a section called 'General Health of the Operatives' where the workers' health was always described as 'good' if there had been no epidemics. 'The general health of operatives has been good', said the Factories Act report in 1928, 'no outbreak of disease in epidemic form having been reported during the year'.⁴⁸ Why was health a question of epidemics, and not one of diet, nutrition or standard of living? The following quotation from the factory inspection report for 1921 suggests the answer:

The Naihati Jute Mills at Naihati, Baranagar Jute Mills at Baranagar, [etc.] . . . reported a shortage of labour in the month of August last owing to

⁴⁶ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., July, 1921, A43-5.

⁴⁷ For evidence of Government of India's interest in these questions see W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Feb. 1927, A1-8; Nov. 1933, A1-27; June 1935, A35-48. For Government of Bengal's reluctance to carry out a wage-census, see W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Nov. 1921, B200-1.

⁴⁸ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Sept. 1929, A12-15.

outbreaks of malaria and influenza. The shortage . . . was not serious and the general health of the operatives . . . has on the whole been satisfactory.⁴⁹

Or, to put the argument in an even more precise form, as did the report for 1923:

The general health of operatives during the year . . . has been comparatively good, no shortage of labour on account of epidemic diseases or sickness having been reported by the mills.⁵⁰

At heart, this was the employer's argument. In the jute mills, health-care for workers was essentially aimed at the prevention of epidemics. Information regarding diseases treated free by the doctors of twenty-three jute mills in 1928 was collected by the Government of Bengal for submission to the Royal Commission on Labour. It is interesting to observe that none of the diseases treated were of nutritional origin: cholera, small-pox, malaria, enteric fever, relapsing fever, kala-azar, dysentery, diarrhoea, pneumonia, tuberculosis of the lungs, and respiratory diseases 'other than infections'.⁵¹ Clearly, most of them were infectious diseases or water- or food-borne diseases, capable of affecting a number of people at the same time, especially under conditions of over-crowding. In other words, potential epidemics. Epidemics were what caused large-scale absenteeism that affected production; besides, they respected no class-barriers. Speaking to the IJMA in 1918, Alexander Murray, then chairman of the Association, referred to a proposal put by mills 'in four different municipalities up the river . . . to spend anything up to Rs 100 per loom' in improving workers' housing, and remarked that he could 'imagine no more profitable investment from a mill labour point of view'. Supporting this view, he said:

In proof of this I might refer to the experiences during the influenza epidemic last year of the mills with which I am most closely associated. Our mill doctors' reports show that the hands living in the bazar suffered far more severely than those living in the mills' own coolie lines. At most of our mills the production for the week ending 20th July, which witnessed the epidemic at its worst, was anything from 15 to 30 per cent below normal. But in the case of one of our mills which houses nearly all its labour in its own lines, the drop was only 5 per cent. . .⁵²

⁴⁹ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., June 1921, A29-30.

⁵⁰ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Aug. 1924, A34-7.

⁵¹ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Apr. 1930, A7-12.

⁵² W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., July 1919, A1-2.

Clearly, to Murray, as to the jute industry, the measure of the severity of epidemics was the drop in production. Hence the health of the workers was mainly a question of epidemics.

One implication of such an outlook was that large areas of working-class life escaped official notice. Once again, the health question illustrates the problem. As a result of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Labour, an investigation was carried out into the conditions of women workers in jute mills in 1931-2. The investigating doctor discovered several diseases that had never found their way into the records of the mill dispensaries. She noted that many of the working-class children 'have a tendency to rickets, shown by slight bending of the legs and bossing of the forehead'. This was 'probably due to deficiency of vitamin D in the food'. While many children looked 'fine' 'in the first year of life', a 'healthy appearance was less common' after that age. Venereal diseases were 'said to be wide-spread', yet there was 'no evidence on the subject'. In the lines of one mill, she came across a young girl 'obviously dying of a pernicious type of anaemia', but 'she was having no treatment'. 'In the lines of another mill', she found 'a woman suffering from a severe degree of ostcomalacia, unable to walk. This is a very great danger in childbirth and with careful treatment can be cured or greatly relieved.' She noticed 'several cases of children reduced to almost extremity'. Another time she saw 'a woman obliged to stop her work for blindness and suffering great pain in the eyes [which] . . . would have been susceptible to treatment'. But a certain kind of 'blindness', in these cases, was what characterized the employer's outlook. The investigating doctor remarked: 'None of these cases were known to the mill doctors, who always accompanied me when I visited the lines.'⁵³

Thus, in claiming as their own a view of labour conditions that really belonged to the owners of capital, the documents of the Bengal Government reproduced something else as well: the 'optical errors' of that vision. Significant aspects of working-class conditions remained hidden from it. This was what in the end undermined the Government of India's project for 'knowledge' of these conditions. The Government of Bengal lacked the political will necessary to distance itself from the employers in the jute industry. This was open knowledge even to the Government of India who, however, never

⁵³ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., July 1932, A2-6.

felt powerful enough to force anyone's hand. On 13 September 1928 Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, wrote to the Secretary of State:

We had a discussion in Council this week on the contemplated enquiry into labour matters . . . no Local Government except Bengal had any objection to our announcing now that such an enquiry would be held; but the Bengal Government entered a strong protest . . . Bengal have on other occasions lately shown a disposition to act as a brake in questions of this kind; for example they stood alone in adopting an uncompromising attitude in respect of minimum wages, and they were nearly alone in pressing for the circulation of the Trade Disputes Bill when we asked if Local Governments would agree to our pushing on with it.

Irwin's conclusion was significant: 'The influence of the employers—and particularly the European employers—is strong there [in Bengal], and they were not likely to receive the news of an enquiry with joy.'⁵⁴

It would once again be wrong to see this 'influence' as a conspiracy of state and capital against labour. Its expressions were too above-board and direct for it to be treated as such. It is better seen as part of the existing political culture. In deciding, for instance, if commercial bodies like the IJMA should be approached directly with the recommendations of the Industrial Unrest Committee (1921), Sir J. H. Kerr, a member of the Governor's Council, wavered:

We must walk warily [he wrote] . . . Sir Alexander Murray warned me specially that the Jute Mills Association would have to be led, not driven, and I think we should be safer in leaving the matter in his hands.⁵⁵

Kerr felt frightened even to start an office like a Labour Bureau with some pretension towards investigation of labour conditions: 'the term bureau frightens people', he wrote; 'I would not start anything in the nature of a Bureau even on paper without consultation with employers.'⁵⁶

So keen was the Government of Bengal in its desire to avoid any confrontation with the owners of the jute mills that factory inspectors were actually encouraged to leave all 'controversial' matters out of their reports. Further, capitalists themselves sometimes had a direct role in weeding out statements unfavourable to their interests. The

⁵⁴ India Office Library, London (hereafter I.O.L.), Mss. Eur. C152/4, Irwin Papers, letter to Birkenhead, 13 Sept. 1928.

⁵⁵ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., July 1921, A43-5 K.W.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

report for 1923 had to be redrafted because of objections from industrialists like Alexander Murray. As the Labour Intelligence Officer explained:

Normally the Chief Inspector of Factories sends in his report to Government without previous sanction, but last year owing to a number of controversial paragraphs being inserted, the report was first unofficially examined. The report had ultimately to be reprinted as strong objection was taken by Sir A. Murray and others to the remarks of the Chief Inspector. There is nothing objectionable in the report [now being] put up, but I have toned down some of the remarks . . .⁵⁷

Even the attendance register that the 1922 Factories Act required the factories to maintain was modified in Bengal to suit the convenience of the jute mill managers. It was made into a less detailed document than it could have been and as a result, admitted the Chief Inspector of Factories in 1930, it became ‘a type of register satisfying the view of the employers [in the jute industry] but futile and inadequate for ensuring establishment of the provisions of Chapter IV [relating to working hours] of the [Factories] Act . . .’⁵⁸

Thus if working-class conditions in the jute mills never quite became an object of knowledge in the way envisaged by the Government of India, the ‘failure’ occurred at two levels. The industry never produced the necessary documents; and the government lacked the political will to carry out its own investigations.

IV

The question of the lack of a ‘political will’ on the part of the Government of Bengal, its inability to force any issue on the IJMA or the jute industry, can be partly comprehended as a negative illustration of Marx’s argument. I say ‘partly’ because some of the spirit of co-operation between the state and capital must have derived from the tight racial bonds that existed between European employers and the British bureaucracy in colonial Bengal.⁵⁹ But one also has to note that the industry (or any sections of employers) never exerted any pressure on the government to equalize ‘the conditions of competition’

⁵⁷ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Aug. 1924, A34-7.

⁵⁸ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 328.

⁵⁹ See A. K. Bagchi, *Private Investment in India 1900-1939* (Cambridge, 1972), Ch. 6.

between different mills. 'Conditions are different in different [mill] centres', said the IJMA to the Royal Commission on Labour. 'One mill provides housing accommodation for all their workers whereas another mill provides none whatever. One mill provides good water, another provides no water.'⁶⁰ An official of the Government of Bengal was to use much stronger words:

Perhaps in no industry in the world, situated in such a circumscribed area, is the wage position more inchoate. The mill groups under different managing agents work under wage systems which have developed many local idiosyncrasies during the long and short years of their existence. Even in mills under the same managing agents there are differences which to persons not acquainted with the position would seem incredible. . . . In . . . groups of mills situated close to each other and under different managing agents, the wage-rates in individual mills are kept, or are supposed to be kept, strictly secret.⁶¹

Yet the jute industry was always content to let all this be; there never arose any significant demand for standardization of wage rates. At the instance of the Royal Commission, the IJMA decided in 1931 to set up a sub-committee to look into the latter problem. The committee admitted in its report the following year that 'nothing can be done in the direction of general standardization [of wages] for all the mills' as there were 'circumstances which preclude any immediate steps being taken'.⁶² The report ended with extremely cautious recommendations for slow and gradual standardization of rates for mills 'in the same districts', but very little came of this. A confidential report on 'Jute Mill Labour Conditions' written in October 1945 by J. Lee, the Senior Labour Officer of the IJMA, referred to the lack of standardization of wage rates as a continuing problem:

Over the last year I have collected statistics of wage-rates paid in the mills and these have all been transferred into a rate paid as "pies per hour" . . . I prepared a list of all occupations, and then gave the maximum rate paid as well as the minimum. The differences in many occupations was very great, and in itself, was . . . a good case for wage-standardization.⁶³

⁶⁰ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 2, p. 163.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 141.

⁶² *I.J.M.A. Report for 1932* (Calcutta, 1933), pp. 314-15.

⁶³ I.J.M.A., Labour Department, 'Confidential Circulars and Notes' file, 1945-6.

The case for standardization remained 'good' and valid into the 1950s.⁶⁴

Why was it that the jute industry, notorious for the feelings of rivalry that mills often harboured against one another, was happy to carry on with an 'inchoate' wage position? Several answers suggest themselves. To consider outside competition first, the relationship between the Calcutta and the Dundee industries was never one of straight-forward competition—as it was between Bombay and Manchester. With Dundee branching off into finer products for survival and Calcutta providing a big employment market for Dundee technicians and managers, the pressures of that potential competition eased off a great deal after 1914-19. The kind of uproar that Dundee industrialists often caused in the 1890s over labour conditions in Calcutta,⁶⁵ became a matter of the past in the twentieth century. Also, the state of organization of the Calcutta jute mill workers was too weak for them to exert any effective pressure on the wage question. Thirdly, the 'individualism' of individual (or a group of) mills was something that the IJMA accepted as the price for its organizational unity, which the industry saw as crucial to its overall prosperity. And fourthly, one must take into account the concentration of economic power within the industry; this must have gone some way towards mitigating any spirit of competition between the mills.

There were, however, two other factors which were perhaps more important than those mentioned above. Paradoxical though it may sound, the per capita expenditure incurred by the mills on their respective labour forces might have varied in fact far less than the discussion on wage rate differences suggests. In other words, it is possible that the 'conditions of competition' between mills remained more or less at par and thus made state intervention superfluous. It will be interesting, in this respect, to depart from the practice of calculating bonuses by themselves and try instead to study these along with other expenditures on labour, e.g. housing, sanitation, water supply, health clinics, etc. Since the amount spent under these latter heads also varied from mill to mill according to differences in the volume of labour supply, employers who paid lower wages might

⁶⁴ See Raghuraj Singh, *Movement of Industrial Wages in India* (Bombay, 1955), pp. 223-5.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, *The Dundee Advertiser*, 28 Jan. 1893, and *I.J.M.A. Report for 1893* (Calcutta, 1894), pp. 22-4.

well have ended up by spending more on housing, etc.. and vice versa. It then seems quite possible that the average amount spent per unit of labour worked out to be roughly the same for different mills, so that the disparities in the 'conditions of competition' did not matter very much.

The point cannot be statistically verified here, detailed information on wage rates and other matters being extremely hard to come by. But there is some evidence to suggest that the industry had developed certain informal means for equalizing 'labour conditions' between the mills (especially those close to one another) or at least for keeping the 'inequalities' well within 'tolerable' limits. For one thing, it was hard to keep the information about wages a secret however much the managing agents might desire such secrecy. 'The total earnings [for different occupations] are not necessarily kept secret', the Government of Bengal told the Royal Commission, and the piece-rates or bonus rates could easily be 'ascertained by spy-work in the bazar'.⁶⁶ Further, the worker's idea of a 'fair wage' often involved a principle of parity with those paid by mills in the neighbourhood. Localized strikes therefore often tended to bring local wage rates in line with one another.

Even more important perhaps was the fact that managers could effectively create an informal climate (and pressure) of opinion which also had a homogenizing influence on labour conditions. When an American firm, the American Manufacturing Company, started a jute mill in Calcutta in the early 1920s, it was said that 'the Directors in the States . . . sanctioned large amounts to be spent on sanitation and welfare of workers, as they were accustomed to such outlay in connection with their jute mills in the United States'. Yet the eventual amount spent turned out to be much less than that sanctioned, for the managers of the other jute mills had objected.

In many cases they [the Directors] would have been willing to go much further than they had actually gone e.g. to give electric light in the workers' houses, as well as a plentiful installation outside in the lines, but had been told that this had never been done here. So at present electric light is limited to the durwans' houses.

It is significant that this mill ultimately settled for the 'district rate' of wages and followed 'the custom in jute mills in the district' in respect

⁶⁶ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 141.

of accident compensation. It also 'modelled' its leave rules (or the laxity of them!) on those at the 'neighbouring jute mills'. And while the 'agents had been willing to put in as good a drainage system as possible' the actual 'type copied was that used by the other Calcutta Jute Mills'.⁶⁷

A lack of standardization in wage rates therefore did not necessarily reflect a competitive situation among the mills regarding their labour conditions. Effective pressure from international competitors was also conspicuously absent. The Bengal Government's views on labour conditions were therefore governed solely by its relationship with capitalists in the jute industry, and in this relationship the latter always predominated. What the state therefore reproduced in its documents was the blinkered vision of capital.

V

But that leaves us with the more crucial question: why was the 'vision' of capital 'blinkered'? Why did the jute mills fail to produce the daily records that the Government of India had asked for? Or to put the question differently: why were the attendance registers kept in such a state that they did not 'reflect the true conditions of labour'? Once again, Marx's argument is useful. To understand the lack of documentation at the level of the factory we have to turn to the problem of 'discipline'. A discussion of 'discipline' has to begin by considering the nature of work and technology in a jute mill, for discipline is, in the first place, a question of training and skills, the 'technical subordination of the worker' to the motion and requirements of the machine. Discipline of course also involves supervision, but we shall take that up later.

Work inside a Calcutta jute mill involved mechanical processes broadly similar to those in a nineteenth-century cotton mill, except that jute was a rougher material than cotton and the humidification necessary for cotton was not needed for jute.⁶⁸ After the raw jute was sorted and batched as it came into the mill, it went through a process

⁶⁷ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Apr. 1923, B77.

⁶⁸ This description is based on the following sources: Centre for South Asian Studies, Cambridge (hereafter C.S.A.S.), Papers of Sir Edward Benthall (hereafter B.P.), Box XVIII, Note entitled 'Indian Jute Industry' (n.d. [1940s?]), and N. C. Saha, 'Inside a Jute Mill', *Jute and Gunny Review*, Feb.–Mar. 1950, pp. 139–43.

of softening and preparation for the eventual spinning and weaving of jute. Softening included passing the jute 'through a softening machine consisting of fluted rollers under heavy pressure when simultaneously an emulsion of oil and water . . . [was] applied', the oil being necessary 'to facilitate the succeeding process of manufacture as jute fibre contains no natural lubrication.' After softening came the preparation stage which included three distinct operations: carding, drawing and roving. The object of carding was 'to break down long stalks or strips of fibre into a continuous broad ribbon of fine fibres' and to lay the fibres parallel to one another. The carding process involved the use of two machines—the breaker card and the finisher card. The former 'breaks and hackles the stalks of [the] fibre' to make it into a broad ribbon 'termed sliver in the trade'. About twelve such slivers were then fed manually into the 'finisher' card 'where the carding operation is continued on finer scale'.⁶⁹ The carded slivers were still not uniform or straight and were therefore subjected to processes called drawing and doubling, where the aim was to obtain 'a greater length of [uniform] fibre for the same unit of weight'. The operations of drawing and doubling were 'combined into one machine called [the] drawing frame'. Drawing thinned out the sliver, doubling counteracted it by combining 'two or more such drawn out slivers into one at the delivery end of the machine'. The last of the preparatory processes was roving, the object of which was to draw out the slivers even further, according to the spinning requirements, while strengthening them by giving them a partial twist. The twisted sliver was called 'rove'.

The next step was spinning, where yarns were made by spinning frames which further drew out the rove, spun it, and finally wound it on spinning bobbins. Warp yarns were twisted harder than weft yarns. The winding department followed next and 'the yarn forming the warp of the cloth . . . [was] wound round . . . bobbins into the form of comparatively large rolls, thereby obtaining a greater continuity in length'. The yarn for the weft in the cloth was wound into '“cops” fitting exactly into the shuttles employed in weaving'. Warp yarn, saturated with a starchy material to prevent breakage in weaving, was then 'drawn on to large beams' (the 'beaming' process) and placed at

⁶⁹ Ibid.: 'The principle of these [carding] machines is a rapidly revolving cylinder armoured with pins whilst smaller pinned rollers revolving at a slower speed are placed parallel to this cylinder and retard the fibre, thus promoting the combing action.'

the back of the loom for weaving. The final stages in the manufacture constituted the finishing process, where the woven cloth was passed through the heavy rollers of a calendering machine for ironing and eventually cut and sewn into bags. The bags again were 'made into bundles of 25 or 30' and packed by a hydraulic press.

The technology accompanying these processes had been 'perfected' in the nineteenth century. S. G. Barker, who investigated the technical side of the Calcutta jute mills in the 1930s, found the technology so stagnant that he likened the industry to a gramophone needle: 'It runs in a groove and plays a nice tune. If either needle or record gets worn, new ones are demanded.'⁷⁰ The 'groove' in Barker's description referred to the lack of diversification of products in the history of the industry and to the crude and rough nature of what was produced. This he saw as a fundamental factor behind technological stagnation: 'hessian, sacking or canvas has not called for any alteration in machinery'. In Barker's words:

Jute being a cheap material producing fabrics for rough usage . . . the machinery and technique in India became standardised upon an elementary mechanical basis. Simplicity of operation without the necessity for textile science since changes were practically non-existent . . . soon led to the mass production of the limited range of Indian jute products becoming almost automatic. The conversion of Jute fibres into fabrics therefore became a mechanical engineering proposition, a position largely maintained to this day. The mechanical influence was greatly enhanced by conditions in India, since spare machine parts and renewals were difficult to get from home. Thus each mill or group was equipped with an efficient mechanics' workshop, which not only maintained the machinery in excellent order but even extended to the construction of duplicates of existing looms, etc. Again the simplicity of the machine principles facilitated this. . . . Machinery in the mills in general, therefore, has had a long working life, perhaps too long.⁷¹

The industry considered this technology so adequate for its purpose that it placed very little premium on the scientific and technological training of its workers and the superior technical staff. Barker was surprised to discover many large and crucial gaps in the technical knowledge of the Scottish managers and assistants—gaps which they

⁷⁰ S. G. Barker, *Report on the Scientific and Technical Development of the Jute Manufacturing Industry in Bengal with an Addenda on Jute, its Scientific Nature and Information Relevant Thereto* (Calcutta, 1935), p. 42.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-2.

usually filled up with that rather undefined human quality called 'experience'. The softening process contained a number of 'unknowns' like 'temperature, moisture content and distribution in the [jute] pile' as well as the optimum pressure between the rollers, 'the actual value for which seemingly . . . [had] no criterion but *experience*'. He was also struck by 'the lack of finality in technical knowledge of the carding process'. The same went for drawing and doubling, where 'the ideal roller pressure' and 'the size of flutings for Jute . . . [had] been determined by *experience*'. For the process of roving, the list of things unknown was formidable. 'Roller covering and pressure, surface speeds, spindle speeds, the flyer mechanism, the distribution of fibre length in the rove, the degree of levelness along its length, fibre control and, in addition, the factors concerning twist and the form of bobbins' were all yet 'to be studied'. Barker's correspondence with some of the mill managers on technical problems dramatically revealed the low priority that the industry gave to technical education. Technical issues were often treated merely as matters of the 'experience', 'opinion' or personal judgement of the people concerned:

From my experience [wrote one manager to Barker] I have found that certain makers' machines are suitable for one class of fibre, while others are suitable for a different class. . . . Pinning [on the rollers]. A number of people favour pinning with light pins whilst others prefer a coarser pinning with a corresponding heavier pin, again only a matter of opinion.

Another point which allows a certain latitude to be taken is roller speeds and ratios, but to my mind this item is not nearly as important as pinning and setting.⁷²

If the manager's knowledge of the machinery had such a glaring 'lack of finality' about it, one can imagine the want of understanding that separated the worker from the machine. This is not to say that the machine did not in any way affect the worker's life in the factory. The mechanical processes in a jute mill were continuous, with one process feeding another, and the work was heavier and noisier than in a typical cotton mill.⁷³ The continuous motion and speed of the machinery was something that the worker had to adjust to. 'Continuous and even flow' of the jute sliver was the responsibility of the

⁷² The quotations in this paragraph are from *ibid.*, pp. 26-7, 30-1, 33, 36. Emphases added.

⁷³ See B. Foley, *Report on Labour in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1906), note (dated 19 Sept. 1905) on Bengal Cotton Mill.

labourers working on the softening, carding, drawing and roving machines.⁷⁴ 'The work of feeding the breaker cards', for instance, was 'heavy' and needed 'constant attention'. The finisher card required the co-operation of three women at a speed matching that of the machine: 'one arranges the slivers side by side at the feed end, one takes delivery at the other and one carries'.⁷⁵ In the spinning department, the shifting of bobbins 'must be done quickly for with bulky material such as jute, the bobbins fill fast and require frequent changing, which necessitates stopping the machine'.⁷⁶ But as the payment of the managing agents and managers often depended on the output, such stoppages were seen as time lost and therefore had to be as brief as possible. Pace also characterized the work in piece-rated departments like weaving or sack-sewing where the worker's earnings depended on how much, and hence how rapidly, he could produce.

This 'subordination' to the machine that the worker suffered in the jute mill, however, was not very 'technical'. The worker did not come to terms with the machine on the basis of even an elementary understanding of its working principles. The story is poignantly told in the nature of accidents which occurred in the jute mills. Many of the fatal ones resulted from the workers attempting to clean the machinery while still in motion or from their (especially women's) loose-fitting clothes getting caught in the moving parts of the machinery.⁷⁷ Accidents of this kind revealed the emphasis that the mill managements placed on the continuous running of the machinery, the laxity of factory rules (about dress) and the little value attached to a worker's life, but also the worker's incomprehension of the running principles of the machinery. In fact, the worker's relationship to the machine, instead of being mediated through technical knowledge, was mediated through the north Indian peasant's conception of his tools, where the tools often took on magical and godly qualities. A religious outlook rather than 'science' determined this relationship, with the difference that in a jute mill, the labourer's tools were far more powerful and malignant than the peasant's implements and were

⁷⁴ See *Report of the Central Wage Board for Jute Industry* (Delhi, 1963), Appendix XVII.

⁷⁵ J. H. Kelman, *Labour in India* (London, 1923), p. 82.

⁷⁶ D. H. Buchanan, *The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India* (New York, 1934), p. 247.

⁷⁷ The factory inspection reports for different years have material supporting this observation.

even capable of claiming lives at the shortest notice. The vivid details of the following report from the 1930s bear witness to this religious consciousness:

In some of the jute mills near Calcutta the mechanics often sacrifice goats at this time [autumn: the time of the *Diwali* festival]. A separate altar is erected by the mechanics of each of the four or five departments in the mill. Various tools and other emblems of their work are placed upon it, together with heaps of sweetmeats and decorations. Incense is burned during an entire day and . . . the buildings are effectively filled with smoke. Towards evening a male goat is thoroughly washed, decorated with proper colors and flowers and prepared for a parade and final sacrifice. The little procession, made up principally of the goat and a band, then marches through the grounds and up and down the aisles of the department to the altar. The animal is fed as many sweets as he will accept, and is then decapitated at one stroke by a long knife and sword. With proper ceremony the head is deposited in the river, in this case . . . the sacred Ganges, while the meat is retained for a feast in the evening. . . . The factory and the power-machine have been readily adopted and given due place in religious ceremony.⁷⁸

It is of course not being claimed here that this religious outlook of the workers would have vanished if only they had been given a scientific knowledge of the machinery. The fact that modern Indian 'holy men' have always counted a good number of Ph.Ds in physics among their camp-followers should act as a sufficient deterrent against such a point of view. Besides, cultures have their own ways of surviving even the most 'hostile' of environments. But what is relevant here is that the Calcutta jute worker's subordination to the pace and requirements of the machinery was not affected through training and education. It was not, in that sense, a case of the 'technical subordination' of Marx's description. The mills in fact were largely averse to the idea of giving their workers or their children any education at all. In 1929, the IJMA said to the Royal Commission

⁷⁸ Buchanan, op. cit., p. 409. The practice of worshipping machine-tools seems to have been widespread among factory workers in eastern India. The present writer remembers being present, as a child, at some of these ceremonies at a small engineering factory in Calcutta. The Jamshedpur steel-industry workers had their annual day of 'Hathyar Puja' (tool-worship) when 'tools and implements attained the status of deity'. 'Bedecked with flowers, the giant cranes and travelling derricks clanked to their appointed tasks; caparisoned with blossoms, the locomotives snorted about on the sidings; streaming garlands, the wheelbarrows squeaked from coalpit to furnace.' Lillian Luker Ashby (with Roger Whatley), *My India* (London, 1938), pp. 287-8.

that it did not think that the provision of education was a 'duty' of the employers.⁷⁹ But their deeper attitudes were revealed in 1914-15 when the Government of Bengal, acting under pressure from Delhi, made some money available for the education of working-class children in the jute mill areas and was forced by the IJMA to confine such education only to those children who were not yet old enough to work in the jute mills. And the lessons, insisted the mill owners, had to be confined to the teaching of 'the three "R"s' and nothing beyond.⁸⁰

The argument that the IJMA put forward to the government (and one that was accepted by the latter) contained an important 'reason' for their lack of interest in workers' education:

The character of the education must not be such as to draw the children away from the profession which they would adopt if they were allowed to continue illiterate. . . it must not render them unfit for *cooly* work.⁸¹

Literacy, in other words, was irrelevant to work in the jute mills. This was so, for, according to the employers, the work was easily learnt and required no rigorous training. Indeed, the bulk of the labour force was made up of totally unskilled labourers (called coolies) employed without exception on manual work. The Census of 1921 found that of a total of 280,854 workers in the Calcutta jute mills no less than 156,633 (i.e. over 55 per cent) were engaged in work involving no machinery at all.⁸² Even of the work that involved the use of machinery it was said in 1937 by jute mill owners themselves that 'up to spinning . . . most of the work is mechanical or routine and can be easily learnt, and labour for these departments is plentiful; winding, weaving and [machine] sewing required skilled labour'.⁸³ How 'easily learnt' was explained in 1906 by the Chairman of the IJMA who spelt out the different amounts of time that were needed to train in the different occupations in a jute mill:

⁷⁹ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 2, p. 160.

⁸⁰ W.B.S.A., Genl. Dept. Edn. Br., Mar. 1913, A69-85; Jan. 1914, A31-36; Apr. 1915, A172-75.

⁸¹ W.B.S.A., Genl. Dept. Edn. Br., Apr. 1915, A172-75.

⁸² *Census of India 1921* (Calcutta, 1923), vol. V, pt. 2, Table XXII, pts. IV and V. This Census report defined all work involving machinery as 'skilled work'.

⁸³ C.S.A.S., B.P., Box XII: Mimeographed note dated 27 Apr. 1937, captioned 'Jute Strike Situation' by J. R. Walker, M.L.A.—circulated for the information of the European Group, Bengal Legislature.

Coolie ['s] [work]	[one] week
Women ['s] [work: mainly preparing and hand-sewing]	[one] week
Shifter ['s] [work]	[one] week
Spinner ['s] [work]	Graduate from shifters; may be a year or more on shifting.
Weaver ['s] [work]	A year to be first-class workman ⁸⁴

This 'learning', again, was purely experiential. It was pointed out by several witnesses to the Royal Commission that there was no apprenticeship system in the jute mills.⁸⁵ The IJMA said in its evidence that 'the bulk of the work in the mill is unskilled, and where training is necessary, as for instance in the spinning department, this is obtained in the course of actual employment, by the efforts of the worker himself'.⁸⁶ On the preparing side, 'a few weeks at any of the machines . . . [was] long enough to make the worker proficient'. Weaving needed 'skilled' work 'but, generally speaking, weavers become proficient very quickly'. Even mechanics, joiners, blacksmiths had no system of formal training: '[they] . . . start as boys, and are paid a nominal wage until they become of use'.⁸⁷

The informality of the jute mills' system of recruitment and training—two important features of industrial discipline—was the subject of comment in 1945 in a note on 'Apprenticeship to Jute Mill Weaving Departments' prepared by the newly-formed Labour Department of the IJMA. 'Notwithstanding that the Jute Industry has prospered and expanded upon the output of its many looms', the note said, 'there has never been established any common method of selecting recruits or of teaching young workers the business of weaving.' Worse still, such informal training as the workers could receive by watching or helping others 'was often a matter of breaking factory rules or legislation: '[the] knowledge of power loom weaving could only be gained by the efforts of the novice himself in time spent, *usually surreptitiously*, beside a friendly weaver already employed in a mill factory'. What permitted such a state of affairs to continue was the stagnation in technology which reflected, as we

⁸⁴ Foley, *op. cit.*, Appendix. ⁸⁵ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 262; pt. 2, pp. 129, 157.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 280.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

have seen, a lack of diversity in the products of the mills and their rather crude nature. This, again, was commented on in the note:

Of recruits who had any specialised tuition in weaving there were none, and there are very few today. . . . No lasting improvement of quality or quantity of outturn could possibly result from this system, and it is probably true that the operative himself is no better equipped technically to turn out good fabric today than was his grandfather fifty years ago. Pride of craftsmanship has not been fostered, nor have any efforts been made to improve or widen the outlook of the operative who frequently never attains greater proficiency than is needed for operating a loom weaving [only] one type of fabric.⁸⁸

This discussion helps explain why the owners in the jute industry took a rather selective view of working-class conditions. Given the easily-learnt nature of jute mill work, individual workers remained highly replaceable as long as the supply of labour was adequate. The task of structuring a labour force was therefore largely a supply proposition to the mills and not a question of skill formation, training or efficiency. An 'ample supply of [cheap] male labour', and not efficiency, was what was always seen as an important key to the prosperity of the mills.⁸⁹ It was in fact the concern with the supply of labour that often produced a certain atmosphere of laxity of rules within a jute mill. As the Factory Inspector explained in his report for 1893:

A number of men, women and children can at most times of the day be seen in the grounds of the large [jute] mills, either asleep under the trees or shady parts of the building, taking their meals, bathing or smoking in a special shed . . . built for the purpose. The question might suggest itself to some . . . as to why so many are able to leave their work at all times of the day when in the Home Mills everyone is kept under lock and key. The answer is simple but a very striking one. There are 100 per cent more hands employed in every Jute Mill in Bengal than is required to work a similar sized mill in Dundee.⁹⁰

The mills obviously found it cheaper to carry with them some excess labour (to meet contingencies like epidemics and absenteeism) than

⁸⁸ This and other quotations in this paragraph come from IJMA, Labour Department file on [confidential] Circulars and Notes of the Committee, 1945-46: Note on 'IJMA Apprenticeship Scheme'. Emphasis added.

⁸⁹ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Nov. 1919, A11-25: Alexander Murray's note on the jute industry.

⁹⁰ W.B.S.A., Genl. Dept. Misc. Br., Aug. 1893, A1-36.

to invest in a healthy, vigorous, efficient working class. As late as 1929, the Indian jute mill worker was half as efficient as a worker in Dundee. The IJMA explained that this was not because 'the work [in India] is unduly hard'. Nor was it caused by 'climatic conditions', but 'simply because this has been the custom so far as the Calcutta jute mills are concerned'.⁹¹

In the eyes of the employers, then, certain aspects of working-class conditions gained priority over others and received more attention. And the knowledge produced as a result of this attention bore the unmistakable stamp of the employers' concern about labour supply. The 'areas of origin' of the workers, for instance, became an object of investigation, especially at moments of inadequate labour supply. Hence the availability of such information. Foley's report of 1905, itself a document on labour supply, gave evidence of this. J. Nicoll of the IJMA told Foley that 'he [Nicoll] had experienced some difficulty [in procuring labour] in his three Jute Mills in 1902, and had *therefore* caused a census to be made that year, showing the districts from which the hands came', and it was this data that Foley reproduced in his report.⁹² But Foley also noted that such information was not collected except in times of labour scarcity. The average jute mill manager, who was 'usually a kindly Scot from Dundee', was 'generally . . . unable to say from where his hands come, and if told the information would convey no meaning to him'.⁹³ Foley's impressions are confirmed by a 1921 report on 'The Conditions of Employment of Women Before and After Child-Birth in Bengal Industries' by Dr D. F. Curjel of the Indian Medical Service.⁹⁴ Of the twenty-five jute mills Curjel visited, none were able to offer any information about the number of children born to their female workers. Curjel was also struck by the managers' lack of interest in working-class conditions. The manager of the Soorah Jute Mill 'did not concern himself with conditions affecting lives of the workers'. Curjel found the manager of the Lawrence Jute Mill 'rather vague as to [the] class of labour employed', and he 'seemed to take little interest' in their conditions. The manager of the Union Jute Mill who 'had been in charge 6 months' told her that 'he had been too busy to think about the health of the workers'. This

⁹¹ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 304.

⁹² Foley, *op. cit.*, Appendix.

⁹⁴ *W.B.S.A. Com. Dept. Com. Br.*, Apr. 1923, B77.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, para 23.

lack of interest was once again reflective of capital's view of labour conditions: they mattered only if and when they affected labour supply. 'It is interesting to find', Curjel noted after talking to the manager of the Howrah Jute Mills, 'how little managers know of the origins of the labour employed in their mills. As long as the sirdars produced the required number of workers, it does not concern them from what district it is drawn.' Even more telling was the reception that Curjel had from the manager of the Ballighata Jute Mill. The manager 'would scarcely discuss' the subject of labour conditions with Curjel. He said 'he did not concern himself with the workers' lives'. 'He took no interest in modern labour questions [and] "thought it all useless".' Curjel notes why this was so: The manager who had been in this mill for many years, did not appear to be the very least interested in conditions affecting his workers, so long as he got the labour.⁹⁵

Thus it was that in the jute mills of Calcutta the employers' vision of labour conditions developed its particular blind spots: the worker's health became a question of epidemics and not one of nutrition; sanitation became a matter of interest but not the standard of living of the worker;⁹⁶ and while the areas of 'origin' of labourers became on occasion a subject of documentation and research, the individual worker remained largely undocumented almost throughout the period under consideration.⁹⁷ The political economy of the jute industry thus goes a long way towards explaining why the mill managers were not particularly careful about the proper maintenance of records relating to conditions of labour.

VI

The selectiveness with which the industry treated the question of labour conditions meant that the factory documents covered a narrow

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ For examples of the jute mills' interest in sanitation see W.B.S.A., Local Self-Government Dept. Public Health Br., Oct. 1928, A7-42; Dec. 1931, A15-21; Dec. 1931, B24-26; June 1932, A70-81. For evidence relating to the extreme scarcity of information about the workers' indebtedness, see *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 2, p. 172 and W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Jan. 1933, B242-74.

⁹⁷ For example, up to 1924 the jute mills did not keep any records of the home addresses of individual workers. The Workmen's Compensation Act made such records necessary (see *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 2, p. 21). Up to 1937 the mills did not keep any employment cards bearing the service histories of individual workers. These were to be introduced in 1937 at the instance of the Bengal Government but not properly till 1948. See *Report of the I.J.M.A. for 1937* (Calcutta, 1938).

range of issues, touching upon only a few aspects of the workers' lives. But apart from the narrowness of their scope, there was yet another problem that the authorities faced in handling these documents: their unreliability. This is why the attendance registers of the jute mills were described in 1930 as not reflecting 'the true conditions' of labour. Factory inspectors, courts of justice trying cases involving jute mill workers, the managers of the mills—all complained of this. 'You will admit', Alexander Murray of the IJMA was asked by Sir Victor Sassoon of the Royal Commission on Labour, 'that it must be very difficult for the management to be sure that the attendance books that come before them are accurate?' 'It is difficult', Murray admitted.⁹⁸ The extent of the 'difficulty' was underscored in the Factory Inspector's report for 1927 where he quoted a letter 'from a Subdivision Officer' as only 'an example of the value' of such documents. The letter read:

In connection with a bad-livelihood case one *** said to be the clerk in charge of the attendance register of the *** Jute Mills, was summoned on behalf of the defence as witness. He gave sworn testimony that the undertrial prisoner *** had attended the mill from the 10th to 13th January 1927 and had drawn Rs 4-11 as wages. He stated that he had noted the attendance personally. It transpired, however, that the said *** was arrested by the Police on 30th December 1926 in connection with a dacoity case and since that day he was continuously in the Jail lock-up to the end of February 1927. The entries in the attendance register must be false entries. . . . The attendance register has been kept in a very slovenly manner and there are many unattested corrections and many entries are in pencil.⁹⁹

Similar remarks were made by the Subdivisional Officer of Serampore who tried the 'Time Babu' of the Champdany Jute Mill in 1913 for employing a child on the basis of a cancelled medical certificate.

I would point out [he said] that the provisional certificate shown to me does not bear any doctor's signature, and appears to be merely a blank form filled up by an unknown person. This suggests a lack of supervision, specially as I was told [that] this was the customary practice.¹⁰⁰

The problem of the unreliability of documents then takes us back to a question already highlighted in our discussion of Marx's argument—the nature and quality of supervision inside the mills. The 'subordinate supervising staff' in the jute mills were of two classes. 'In the first class there would be the more or less educated

⁹⁸ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 2, p. 144.

⁹⁹ *W.B.S.A.*, Com. Dept. Com. Br., Sept. 1928, A21-25.

¹⁰⁰ *W.B.S.A.*, Finance Dept. Com. Br., Mar. 1915, A58-59.

babu who has never been a mill operative himself'. Initially appointed as an apprentice, the *babu* was soon promoted to supervisory work under a Scottish assistant. The duties of the *babu* would be to 'check attendances, to keep attendance registers', to prepare wage books and 'generally assist in the supervision and work of the department'.¹⁰¹ Below the *babu* was the *sardar* who was both a supplier and supervisor of labour and whose social origins were often the same as those of the ordinary worker himself. The Government of Bengal pictured the *sardar* thus:

The immediate employer of a worker is his sirdar. The sirdar gives him his job and it is by his will that the worker retains it. . . . The sirdars are the real masters of men. They employ them and dismiss them, and, in many cases, they house them and can unhouse them. They may own or control the shops which supply the men with food. The operative, too, pays his lump or recurring sum to the sirdar to retain his job. His life, indeed, at every turn is coloured by sirdarism.¹⁰²

The IJMA described the sardars and the under-sardars as constituting 'the lower subordinate supervising staff of the mills'.¹⁰³

The *sardar* assisted the *babu* in the latter's task of maintaining factory documents. The process was explained in the conversation that took place between Victor Sassoon and Alexander Murray during the proceedings of the Royal Commission on Labour:

- Sassoon [S]: Is the only check as to attendance after the men are at their machines?
- Murray [M]: That is right.
- S: Token [designating shifts] are not taken at the gate and put on their machines?
- M: No. The check is taken after the workman is at the machine.
- S: The *baboo* walks round the machinery and puts down the number of people he happens to see working at the machines or probably the *sardar* tells him are present?
- M: He is supposed to check up each worker individually.
- S: But I take it the *sardar* tells him who is there and he takes the word of the *sardar* to a great extent?
- M: That may happen.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ *R.C.L.J.*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 280-1.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 280-1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. V, pt. 2, pp. 144-5.

We have quoted earlier the Government of Bengal's description of the *sardar*. As that description will have made clear, *sardari* was primarily about supervisory workers making money at the expense of the ordinary worker through such means as moneylending, bribery, etc. More *sardars* 'dismissed labour and engaged fresh hands just at their pleasure', the IJMA complained to the Royal Commission, and 'each man who signed on had to pay for the job'.¹⁰⁵ In this the *sardar* often acted in league with the *babu*.

It is easy to see that the 'corruption' of the *sardar* and the *babu* would have necessarily imparted a perverse character to the mill documents relating to working-class conditions—wage books, attendance registers, fine books, shift tokens, medical certificates, etc. This at any rate was the burden of the official complaints. One example that the authorities often gave to support their contention was the way the medical certificates of child workers were treated in the mills. In point of law, these certificates were meant to protect the health of the working class by preventing the employment of under-age children. But the practice of each child recruit having to bribe the *sardars* and the *babus* made this impossible of attainment. As the Chief Inspector of Factories explained to the Royal Commission:

The sirdar produces the children and, in many cases, allows them to be employed whether they are fit, certified or not, and he being illiterate cannot satisfy himself as to the correctness of the entries in the register. He must, however, keep the spindles going, if not directly to maintain continuity of production, to maintain his receipts on a child capitation basis.¹⁰⁶

This apparently led to a fairly rapid turnover of children from individual mills, a process that contributed to the 'unreliability' of documents. Captain O'Connor, the Senior Certifying Surgeon of Factories, Barackpore district, wrote: 'The principal reason why children migrate from mill to mill is that they are forcibly turned out by sirdars for pecuniary gain'. The result was that it became 'quite normal ... for a child to have a certificate in each of a number of mills in a district', and a child 'whose certificate is cancelled for not being produced' could 'easily be re-certified under another name'.¹⁰⁷ Colonel Nott, the Civil Surgeon of Howrah, reported a case in 1913

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., vol. V, pt. 1, p. 92.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 333-4.

in which the same child applied to him on the same day for certificates in two different names, one Muslim and the other Hindu—Pir Mahomed and Banojowah. Enquiries revealed that he had done it at the *sardar*'s instruction.¹⁰⁸

A similar phenomenon could be observed in the case of adult labour as well. 'When checking registers', wrote the Factory Inspector in 1930, 'a woman under examination may give two or three names with a certain amount of persistence'.¹⁰⁹ The manipulation of the attendance registers (and other documents) by *sardars* and *babus* invariably led to an inflation of the wage bill. 'You may have 10 per cent of the names on your books', the Royal Commission suggested to the manager of the Caledonian Jute Mill, 'who actually do not exist as far as working is concerned and that money goes somewhere?' 'Yes,' replied the manager, 'it is divided between the baboos and the sardars and the man who is doing the two men's jobs.'¹¹⁰ Another manager admitted in his evidence that about 7.5 per cent of his labour force were probably such ghost workers.¹¹¹ The Chief Inspector of Factories however thought these figures to be underestimates. While 'theoretically' and 'according to the register', the multiple shift mills carried 22 or 25 per cent more labour than single-shift mills, the Inspector knew that in reality it was 'considerably less than 10 per cent'.¹¹²

A study of the process of 'supervision' within a jute mill—a problem that Marx saw as central to the question of documentation of the conditions of work—turns on the problem of the 'corruption' of the supervisory staff. Why was 'the labour of overlooking' in a Calcutta jute mill riddled with 'corruption'? How does one account for the widespread practice of falsifying documents?

VII

One could obviously and easily develop a 'needs of capital' type argument in response to these questions. It could be argued, for instance, that the *sardar* existed only because he served the 'needs of

¹⁰⁸ W.B.S.A., Finance Dept. Com. Br., Mar. 1915, A58-9.

¹⁰⁹ W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Aug. 1931, A33-6.

¹¹⁰ *R.C.L.J.*, vol. V, pt. 2, pp. 142, 144-5.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

capital' in the jute industry and that his so-called 'corrupt' practices—recruiting workers for bribes, housing them, lending them money at high interests—constituted a kind of service to capital in a labour market that the industry had done very little to structure.

There is a body of evidence that supports this view. The mills, it would appear, were prepared to tolerate the 'corrupt' practices of the *sardar* as he was considered indispensable. Even though the IJMA bitterly complained to the Royal Commission about *sardari* 'corruption', they nevertheless insisted that 'you [could] not do without sardars'.¹¹³ The financial outlays made by the mills on wages to be paid to the labourers clearly allowed for a certain amount of leakage through *sardari* corruption. Admittedly, this was not true of the (relatively) high-wage, piece-paid department of weaving where 'a check [was] made by calculating the total production of each section of the department, so that the total amount actually earned by production must equal the amount to be paid out'.¹¹⁴ In weaving, therefore, *sardari* extortion of ordinary workers took the form of bribery, moneylending, etc.¹¹⁵ But in every other department the wage policy followed the simple aim of keeping the 'corrupt' practices of the *sardar* and the *babu* (e.g. inflating the wage bill by employing 'ghost workers') under control rather than attempting to abolish them altogether.

In each department throughout the works . . . a complement is drawn up, showing the number of hands it requires to run satisfactorily; and against this number is shown the amount in wages that such departments are bound down to.¹¹⁶

There is also evidence suggesting the direct complicity, in some cases, of the Scottish overseers and managers of the mills in the 'corrupt' acts of the *sardar* and the *babu*. The Kankinarrah Labour Union (formed in 1922) 'once exposed a case of bribery when Rs 3000 had been paid for the position of a Head Sardar'. The President of the Union, K. C. Roy Chowdhury, noted in his diary that 'the money had been received by a friend of the manager of the [jute] mill

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 150.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., vol. V, pt. 1, p. 281.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., vol. V, pt. 2, p. 120.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., vol. V, pt. 1, p. 281.

concerned'.¹¹⁷ His diary also had the following entry which is even more revealing:

Sen, the Head Babu of the Union [Jute] Mill, informed me today that numerous false tickets [tokens] are distributed every day at their mill. This means that tokens are distributed in the names of people who have not actually done any work. The money is then divided between the sardars, the Head Babu and the European overseer sahib. Bima sardar reportedly even supplies the weekly groceries for the overseer sahibs free of any cost.¹¹⁸

How did all this suit the 'needs of capital'? Why were the owners of capital in the jute industry prepared to overlook, and at best contain, this 'corruption' rather than stamp out the practices? Obviously, the *sardar* in his role of labour-supplier was important to the industry's view of its own interests. The Chief Inspector of Factories explained this in 1913:

All mills have to rely on the Sirdars and Time-Babus of their various departments for the supply of labour, [and therefore] the Manager has either to overlook irregularities practised by these men or to deal strictly with them and face a shortage [of labour] which results in a reduced weekly outturn in tonnage of gunnies, and seriously affects his position with the Managing Agents.¹¹⁹

But as we shall see, finding inexpensive ways of controlling labour was a problem of greater concern to the industry than that of labour supply. And this was the reason for the continued importance of the *sirdar*. To understand why this was so we have to look at the nature of the demand for labour that the industry created and the way it proceeded to meet that demand.

A plentiful supply of labour was considered necessary for the progress of the industry. Between the years 1895 and 1926, when the industry enjoyed an almost uninterrupted period of prosperity and expansion of output, the number of workers employed in the mills grew from 73,725 to 338,497. The supply of labour had to be adjusted to the IJMA-devised strategy of short-time working which frequently

¹¹⁷ Papers of K. C. Roy Chowdhury (hereafter K.C.R.P.), Bengali diary no. 3, entries for 25 Aug. to 28 Nov. 1929. These papers, at present in my possession, were made available to me through the kind courtesy of Mr Basudha Chakrabarty and Mrs Nabaneeta Deb Sen.

¹¹⁸ K.C.R.P., Bengali diary no. 3, entry for 6 Oct. 1929.

¹¹⁹ W.B.S.A., Finance Dept. Com. Br., Mar. 1915, A58-59.

imposed weekly 'idle days' on the mills as a way of reducing output (to match temporary fluctuations in demand) and wage bills.¹²⁰ From 1913 onwards, the mills kept changing 'from four to five days a week or from five days to six days a week and so on at different intervals', sometimes changing 'twice or three times a year'.¹²¹ But as the mills offered no incentives for long-term service, a temporary closure of a mill often meant a temporary loss of labour. The problem was an old one,¹²² but assumed critical importance in the prosperous years of 1895-1926 when individual mills always wanted to conserve labour for days when they might be called upon to expand output.

The means devised to meet this end was the multiple shift system whereby the labour force was worked in three or four shifts during the day and into the night.¹²³ Between 1913 and 1926 more than 90 per cent of the jute mills worked on this system.¹²⁴ Its main advantage was not economy. An 'abundance of labour or surfeit of it . . . [was] a necessary concomitant of multiple-shift employment', as that was the only way it could be ensured, at least on paper, that the workers did not work beyond the legally allowed hours.¹²⁵ There was for instance an elaborate relief system for weavers which necessitated employing extra 'daily-weavers'.¹²⁶ It was generally agreed in 1929 that a multiple shift mill carried 25 to 30 per cent more labour (at least on its books) than a single shift mill.¹²⁷ But therein lay its advantage, a reduction in the risk of a bottle-neck developing in labour supply should the trade ever demand an increase in output.

By an accident of history, the industry's search for an ample

¹²⁰ Cf. *The Report of the I.J.M.A. for the Half-Year Ending 30 June 1886* (Calcutta, 1886), p. 14.

¹²¹ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 2, pp. 168-9.

¹²² *The Jute Mills of Bengal* (Dundee, 1880), p. 48, mentions the case of Seebpore Jute Manufacturing Co. Ltd. whose directors decided to continue working 'rather than temporarily close the mill and lose the workpeople', even when they were faced with a depressed 'bag market'.

¹²³ For a good description of the multiple shift system, see W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Jan. 1929, B261-8.

¹²⁴ See *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 2, pp. 168-9, 195. Between 1926 and 1929 half of the mills transferred to the single shift system as a result of a deterioration in the trade position. After 1930, all the mills were working single shift. *Ibid.*, vol. V, pt. 1, pp. 81-2.

¹²⁵ W.B.S.A., Com. Br., Com. Dept. May 1929, B196-99 and Jan. 1929, B261-68.

¹²⁶ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 2, p. 167.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 15.

supply of labour took place at a time that saw enormous increases in the emigration of labour from Bihar and UP and other regions into Bengal. 'Twenty years ago', Foley wrote in 1905, 'all the hands [in jute mills] were Bengalis. These have been gradually replaced by Hindustanis from the United Provinces and Bihar . . . so that at present in most of the mills two-thirds of the hands are composed of up-countrymen.'¹²⁸ And once the flow started 'from up-country', it flowed—as the Royal Commission on Labour was told—'very strongly'.¹²⁹ The situation was considered so satisfactory by 1895 that an official enquiry committee formed to investigate the question of labour supply to the Bengal coal mines felt that 'there was no necessity' to conduct any 'exhaustive enquiry into the subject of labour supply for jute mills'. Nor did the mills particularly press for one.¹³⁰ Foley was 'somewhat astonished' in 1905 to find that large increases in demand for jute mill labour between 1895-6 and 1903-4 had been easily met despite there being 'no recruitment on any systematic method . . . at all', and without any 'material' rise in wages.¹³¹ Even the problem of a seasonal shortage of labour—as during harvesting months, for example—that Foley and other early observers of the industry often commented on seems to have lost its importance in the later years. In their memorandum dealing with 'methods of recruitment' the IJMA said to the Royal Commission in 1929 that 'labour is in good supply all the year round'. When asked about the seasonal shortage of the 'olden days', the IJMA representatives remarked that even those conditions had changed after 1914: 'the fact remains that since 1914 labour has never been scarce'.¹³²

Evidence of the industry's sense of satisfaction regarding the supply of labour may also be seen in certain significant changes in the geographical location of the mills. In the early days, when the mill hands were local—that is, 'mostly Bengalis'—an 'isolated site' for a mill was 'recognized as an advantage, the hands . . . living in the neighbourhood'.¹³³ In those years 'it was considered by the mills a

¹²⁸ Foley, *op. cit.*, para. 28.

¹²⁹ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 2, p. 237.

¹³⁰ *Report of Labour Enquiry Committee of 1895* (Calcutta, 1896), pp. 49-51. See also A. K. Bagchi, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

¹³¹ Foley, *op. cit.*, paras 18, 21-4.

¹³² *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 2, p. 162.

¹³³ Foley, *op. cit.*, para. 26. The early mills like Fort Gloster, Gourepore, Budge Budge, Kamarhati, etc., all followed this policy: see *The Jute Mills of Bengal*, pp. 27, 35-6, 43, 45, 68, 81.

matter of life and death to prevent a rival company settling down in proximity to their labour supply'.¹³⁴ The first two years of the Victoria Jute Mill built in 1885 on the river bank opposite the Samnugger Jute Mill were marked by what Wallace called 'the celebrated land dispute' between the two mills.¹³⁵ 'We are a little short of hands this week', ran a typically complaining letter from the Samnugger Mill to its directors in 1887, '... and this may affect us. The Victoria [Mill] has taken up all our spare hands . . . [and] we do not have so many to fall back on and that injures us a bit.'¹³⁶ The Hastings Mill's rather 'unremunerative'¹³⁷ decision in 1894 to work day and night by electric light was 'said to have been suggested by a rumour that another . . . firm contemplated putting up a large Mill near Hastings, whereupon the proprietors of the latter thought they might as well find employment for all the hands in the neighbourhood . . . by running 22 hours, instead of from daylight to dark'.¹³⁸ As labour became 'chiefly immigrant' and came of its own in abundant numbers, the situation soon reversed itself. Mills were no longer located in isolation from one another. Instead, noted Foley, 'it is considered now [1905] . . . an advantage to have a site in a centre, such . . . as Kankinara, where immigrant labour congregates'.¹³⁹ This explains why the number of mills on the 24 Parganas side of the river Hooghly—where Kankinara, Jagaddal and other centres of immigrant labour were located in very close proximity to one another—eventually grew much faster than the numbers in other districts (see Table 1).

A significant aspect of this migration of labour from UP, Bihar and other places into Bengal was that it enabled the industry to replace Bengali workers by their 'cheaper', up-country substitutes and this at a time when the industry was looking for ways of reducing expenses. The IJMA's move in 1886 to reduce wage expenditure by short-time working was in fact preceded by 'most of the Mills . . . taking action to effect a reduction of wages', for 'the tone of the market . . . [was] still very unfavourable'.¹⁴⁰ Just how large these reductions were is suggested

¹³⁴ D. R. Wallace, *The Romance of Jute* (Calcutta, 1909), p. 38.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Archives of Thomas Duff and Company, Dundee (hereafter T.D.A.), letter from the Calcutta Agent dated 10 May 1887.

¹³⁷ Wallace, op. cit., p. 47.

¹³⁸ John Leng, 'The Indian Dundee' in his *Letters from India and Ceylon* (Dundee, 1896), p. 79.

¹³⁹ Foley, op. cit., para 26.

¹⁴⁰ T.D.A. Minute books of the Titaghur Jute Factory, letters from the Calcutta Agent dated 25 June 1884 and 20 May 1885.

TABLE 1

District	No. of jute mills in the year			
	1880	1896	1911	1921
Hooghly	4	6	7	9
Howrah	5	6	9	12
24 Parganas	6	15	31	38
Calcutta	3	3	3	5

Sources: For 1880, *The Jute Mills of Bengal* (Dundee, 1880); for 1896, John Leng, 'The Indian Dundee' in his *Letters from India and Ceylon* (Dundee, 1896); for 1911 and 1921, *Census of India 1921*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 403.

by a letter that the Dundee directors of the Titaghur jute factory received from their Calcutta manager towards the end of 1885. The letter reported, to the directors' delight, 'that the wages at the works have now been reduced Rs 1000 per week below what used to be paid, which the Directors considered very satisfactory and creditable to the Manager'.¹⁴¹ The prolongation of working hours with the introduction of electricity into the mills about 1895¹⁴² also seems to have caused a decline in the Bengali component of the labour force.¹⁴³ Whatever the specific factors aiding these changes in the social composition of the jute mill working class, the result was that by the 1920s the labour force was of a predominantly migrant character (see Table 2).

It is important to emphasize that the industry did little to help these migrant workers to settle down in the city, and thus develop a permanently stable labour force. The reason for this inaction lay in the very mercantilist notion of profit that the jute mills employed in handling their affairs. To the Scottish (and later Marwari) entrepreneurs in the industry, profit was firmly linked to the idea of 'cheap products'. It was thought that their cheapness gave these products—sacking and hessian of a very crude quality—a competitive edge over any natural or synthetic substitutes. Hence the insistence within the industry on keeping their products crude and

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Minutes for 21 Oct. 1885.

¹⁴² Wallace, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁴³ See the *Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission* (London, 1909), vol. 2, p. 271.

TABLE 2

Year	Areas of origin of jute-mill workers, 1921-41 (figures in percentages)						
	Bengal	Bihar	Orissa	United Provinces	Madras	Central Provinces	Others
1921	24.1	33.4	11.4	23.2	4.6	N.A.	3.2
1928	24.8	37.1		15.7	11.2	9.1	1.9
1929	17	60 (inc. Orissa)		5	14	4	N.A.
1941	11.6	43.1 (inc. Orissa)	3.4	36.4	1.6	N.A.	0.8

(Figures have been rounded off to the first decimal place.)

Sources : Ranajit Das Gupta, 'Factory Labour in Eastern India: Sources of Supply, 1855-1946—Some Preliminary Findings', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. XIII, no. 3, p. 297, Table 6, except for the column for 1928 which is derived from W.B.S.A., Com. Dept. Com. Br., Apr. 1930, A7-12. The 1921 figures apply to the whole of the labour force and the 1928 figures relate to 25 jute mills. The 1929 figures are very approximate, and the 1941 figures were drawn from a sample survey of mill workers in the Jagaddal area and hence are not representative of the whole working class.

inexpensive¹⁴⁴—a policy which resulted in a stagnant technology and an unskilled labour force. Besides, an inexpensive product had to be produced at a low cost, and the availability of cheap labour in eastern India was seen as a definite advantage in this regard. Thus developed the labour-intensive nature of the industry, where labour alone accounted for about 50 per cent of the cost of converting raw jute into the finished material (see Table 3).

The bulk of this 'labour cost' was constituted of wages. Given their concern for keeping down the prices of their products while using labour-intensive methods of production, the owners of the jute mills were reluctant to spend on labour anything beyond such minimum necessities as wages. And even the wages paid were single-worker wages; they were not enough to support a worker's family. According to an estimate of 1929 the 'average income' of a jute mill worker was Rs 5 per week, while it would cost him at least Rs 7 to maintain a family of himself, his wife and, say, three children.¹⁴⁵ The increase

¹⁴⁴ Space does not permit any substantiation of the statements made here about the industry, but the reader may be assured that they are based on a careful consideration of the available evidence.

¹⁴⁵ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 2, p. 132.

TABLE 3

<i>Year</i>	<i>Labour cost as percentage of the cost of conversion (figures relate to different mills)</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
1880 ^a	45	Figures for two mills
	40	
c. 1900 ^b	55	Figure for a hypothetical Calcutta mill
1927 ^c	50	Figure for one mill
1937 ^d	49.6	Figure for four mills
	55.4	
	50.7	
	49.5	

Sources: for (a), *The Jute Mills of Bengal* (Dundee, 1880), pp. 20, 47; for (b), Archives of the Modern History Department, Dundee University, Card Collection on Cox Brothers, card entitled 'Cost of Mill and Factory' (c. 1900); for (c), D. H. Buchanan, op. cit., p. 250; for (d), C.S.A.S., B.P., Box XIII, 'Paul' to Edward Benthall, 20 Sept. 1937, Enclosures.

over the years in investment in workers' housing was extremely tardy. An 1897 survey of about 73,000 of the Bengal jute mill workers showed only 13.5 per cent of them living in company-built coolie-lines. The rest had had to make their own arrangements.¹⁴⁶ Thirty years later in 1929 when the mill labour force had increased to 339,665, only 30 per cent of the jute mill labour were housed by the mills, according to the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and the IJMA.¹⁴⁷ Stability of labour was obviously not in itself a crucial concern to the industry—semi-skilled or unskilled workers being highly replaceable—so long as the supply of labour remained abundant.

One can also see this in the extremely underdeveloped nature of the factory rules that were in operation in the jute mills. The service rules, for instance, had been left largely uncodified. Graded wage systems (with provisions for regular increments), pensions, provident funds, sickness insurance, leave rules—all the usual inducements for long-term service and stability—were conspicuous by their absence. Leave as a rule was without pay and the amount of pay due to a worker during his or her sickness remained 'a matter for the manager's

¹⁴⁶ W.B.S.A., Judicial Dept. Police Br., Sept. 1897, A95-99.

¹⁴⁷ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 282; pt. 2, p. 284.

discretion'.¹⁴⁸ Sickness insurance was considered 'impossible'¹⁴⁹ and so were provident funds and pensions. When the workers of the Fort William, the Howrah and the Ganges jute mills went out on strike in February 1937, the Secretary to the Government of Bengal concluded that they could not have had any 'serious grievances' as their leaders asked for 'such obviously impossible terms as provision of provident funds and pension'.¹⁵⁰

For such an uncared-for and poverty-ridden working class, the *sardar* performed functions that ideally should have been performed by the employers, such as supplying work, credit and housing. R. N. Gilchrist, the Labour Intelligence Officer of Bengal, pictures the average migrant worker 'as he sets out from his village to find work' thus:

The sirdar may oblige him with his fare and a little money to buy food on the way. . . . The sirdar may advance him a little more money, for a job may not be immediately available, and he may also direct him to live in certain quarters and to buy his rice at a certain shop. The day when there is a vacancy comes, and the sirdar may say: 'Your pay on the books of the mill is twelve rupees a month, but I have incurred some expense for you. Usually when I give a job, I require thirty rupees down and one rupee a month for two years. You have no money to give me as a lump sum, so you will pay me two rupees a month for as long as I secure you a job. If you do not, I cannot be certain your job will last.' The grateful youth . . . gratefully accepts. . . . As he grows older and wiser, he gradually finds out that the sirdar owns the house in which he shares a room with six others and for which they all pay rent, and that he also owns the shop where he buys his rice.¹⁵¹

This of course was part of the 'corruption' that the industry and the government complained of. The *sardari* practices undoubtedly constituted a kind of secondary exploitation of ordinary workers by their supervisory or superior colleagues.¹⁵² But it could be legitimately

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., vol. V, pt. 2, p. 155.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., vol. V, pt. 1, p. 283-5.

¹⁵⁰ W.B.S.A., Home Poll, Confdl. No. 60/1937.

¹⁵¹ R. N. Gilchrist, *Indian Labour and the Land* (Calcutta, 1932), pp. 6-7.

¹⁵² The words '*sardari* practices' are used here in a generalized sense to designate activities not only of the Head *sardars* but of the under-*sardars* and some other workers as well. In an industry devoid of any structuring of skills or promotions, exploitation of the fellow worker was one important means of material advancement. The more ambitious and the luckier worker often followed the *sardar's* example of being a moneylender or a landlord to the less fortunate. *Sardari* is thus best treated both as a real institution and as a working-class ideal of success. See *R.C.L.I.*, vol. XI, pt. 2, pp. 358, 365.

argued that the employers allowed such 'corruption' to exist because it saved them the expense of investing in institutions otherwise typical of the capitalist control of labour. *Sardari* control was cheaper than housing, health care or an articulated body of rules guiding the conditions of work.

VIII

A 'needs of capital' type of argument then tells us that the *sardar* existed along with his invariably 'corrupt' practices mainly because they were allowed so to exist. They suited the strategy of capital. This is fine and important but it does not go far enough for the purpose at hand. Most important, it does not answer the question that Marx helps us to raise: what was the relationship between the *sardar's* authority and his 'corruption'? As we have seen, it was *sardari* 'corruption' that ultimately distorted the documents which the supervisors in a jute mill were required to produce and keep. The nature of supervisory authority in the Calcutta jute mills was thus significantly different from the one discussed in Marx's argument. For Marx, the supervisor's authority in capitalist relations of production manifested itself in the keeping of time sheets, fine books, attendance registers, wage rolls, etc. Such maintenance of documents implied a keeping of the wage contract between capital and labour. And the notion of the contract took us back to Marx's specific assumptions regarding working-class culture, assumptions that informed his category of 'capital'. Our jute mills, however, present a very different picture. The supervisory authority of the *sardar* (or of his accomplice *babu*) produced unreliable, falsified documents. One could in fact go further and argue that falsifying documents was integral to the operation of the power and authority that the *sardar* wielded over the ordinary coolie. What appeared to the state as 'corruption', 'abuse', breaking of the rules, etc., was precisely the form in which the *sardar's* authority was manifested. Or to put it in another way, it was an authority that was incompatible with any bourgeois notions of legality, factory codes and service rules.

We would be mistaken, for example, to see the bribe that the ordinary coolie gave the *sardar* simply as an economic transaction. The bribe was also a sign, a representation, of the *sardar's* authority and its acceptance by the worker, which is why an act of refusal to

pay the bribe was seen as a gesture of defiance and exposed the worker to a degree of anger, vendetta and violence from the *sardar* that was often out of proportion to the amount of money involved. K. C. Roy Chowdhury's diaries mention the not untypical¹⁵³ case of one Abdul, a worker of the Hukumchand Jute Mill, who was stabbed by the followers of a certain *sardar* called Sujat for having refused to pay the latter his *dastoori*, or customary commission.¹⁵³ The nature of the *sardar's* authority and power is visible in the details of the following letter that some twenty-eight workers of the Budge Budge Jute Mill once wrote to a Bengali barrister in December 1906:

We have to get permission for leaves from the Sahib. But we have to pay bribes to the babu and the sardar at the time of the leave; further, they take bribes from us every month and also when the Durga Puja season approaches. If we refuse to pay them they get the sahib to fine or dismiss us on false charges of bad workmanship. Till recently we felt compelled to meet their unjust demands. But as prices ran very high last year at the time of the Durga Puja, we expressed our intention to pay them a little less than in earlier years. At this the Head Sardar Haricharan Khanra has been going around instigating the Assistant Babu Atul Chandra Chattopadhyay to collect even more *parbani* [gifts customarily due at times of religious festivals; *parban* = religious festival] than usual. The two of them have even advised the in-charge Panchanan Ghose, a nice gentleman otherwise, to force us to pay a much larger *parbani* this year. When [in protest] we stopped paying any *parbani* whatsoever, they got the sahib to fine us on cooked up charges. . . . But, in truth, we are not guilty.¹⁵⁴

A large part of the *sardar's* authority was then based on fear: 'we felt *compelled* to meet their unjust demands'. So great was the fear of the *sardar's* vengeance that several of the workers interviewed by the Royal Commission strenuously denied having paid any bribes for their employment. But their denial lacked the force of conviction. Sorju, an under-*sardar* of the Anglo-Indian Jute Mill, admitted that there was bribery 'in every department' of the mill but claimed that there was none in his own. Kalil, a weaver in the same mill, said that he had heard 'that *sardars* take Rs 5 or Rs 10 but so far as I am concerned I did not pay anything'.¹⁵⁵ Harilal, a spinner in the Titaghur

¹⁵³ K.C.R.P., Bengali diary no. 2, entry for 12 Apr. 1928.

¹⁵⁴ The letter is quoted in Sumit Sarkar, 'Swadeshi Yuger Sramik Andolon: Kayekti Aprakashita Dalil', *Itihas*, vol. IV, No. 2, Bhadra-Agrahayan 1376 (1969), pp. 113-15.

¹⁵⁵ R.C.L.I., vol. V, pt. 2, p. 26.

Jute Mill, insisted that he 'did not pay any *bakshish* for getting my job' while he thought it possible that 'other people might be paying *bakshish* to the *sardar*'.¹⁵⁶ A Madrasi female worker of the Howrah Jute Mill told her interviewers that she got her employment only after promising the *sardar* two rupees from her 'first wages'. On the statement being read out to her, however, she retracted it. 'It is probably true', remarked the interviewers.¹⁵⁷

It is of course undeniable that much of this fear of the *sardar* derived from the employers allowing him to 'dismiss and engage fresh hands just at [his] pleasure' (to repeat the words of the IJMA). Babuniya, a Bihari female worker of the Titaghur Jute Mill, expressed her fear to the Royal Commission thus:

When I was first entertained I had to pay Rs 4 *bakshish* to the *sardar* who appointed me. Each time I return back from the village I have to pay the same amount as *bakshish* to the *sardar*. I also pay him 2 as. every week. My husband paid Rs 6 when he was first appointed. He pays 4 annas a week to the *sardar*. If we refuse to pay the *sardars* we will not get work. Every worker pays a similar amount to the *sardar*.¹⁵⁸

Another important element in the *sardar's* domination was the use of naked physical force. For the ordinary worker, as we have noted, there was always 'the fear of being beaten'. The child workers, it was said, would not normally speak up against the *sardar* for this very reason.¹⁵⁹ Narsama Kurmi, a female worker of the Howrah Jute Mill, was 'obliged to leave' Howrah as 'she had trouble with a sirdar'. She returned only after 'she found [that] the sirdar who annoyed her [had] gone'.¹⁶⁰

Like all domination, however, the *sardar's* domination was not based on fear alone. There was always an undercurrent of tension between the *sardar* and the ordinary worker and pushed beyond a certain point, the worker could become openly hostile. To be effective therefore the *sardar's* authority also needed legitimacy and acceptance. Fear had to be balanced by respect. In fact, according to R. N. Gilchrist, the typical jute-mill *sardar* was more respected than feared. 'The sirdar [is] a man of considerable importance', Gilchrist wrote. 'He is... respected, perhaps even feared.'¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., vol. XI, pt. 2, p. 360.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., vol. V, pt. 2, p. 77.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., vol. V, pt. 1, p. 333.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., vol. XI, pt. 2, p. 360.

¹⁶¹ R. N. Gilchrist, op. cit., p. 6.

What made the *sardar's* authority effective? Our tentative answer would be 'culture', the culture to which both the *sardar* and the worker belonged. In essence this was a pre-capitalist culture with a strong emphasis on religion, community, kinship, language and other primordial loyalties. The evidence on this point is not direct but is extremely suggestive. It seems significant, for instance, that all the words used by the workers (and others) to describe *sardari* extortions—extortions summed up in the legalistic expression 'corruption' or 'abuses'—were words of pre-capitalist, pre-British origin: *dastoori*, *bakshish*, *batta*, *parbani*, *salami*, etc. *Dastoori*, the most widely used of these words, came from the word *dastoor* which meant 'custom' or 'tradition'. Even the word *sardar* in its meaning of 'labour supplier'—though literally it meant 'a headman'—was in vogue in the late eighteenth century and perhaps even earlier.¹⁶² Besides, the *sardar's* mode of operation had certain crucial pre-capitalist elements. He usually recruited on the basis of the often overlapping networks of community, village and kin. The Government of Bengal wrote:

Sirdars in the jute mills, engineering works, and other concerns recruit in their own native villages and surrounding areas; hence there is a tendency for people from the same village or the immediate neighbourhood to congregate in the same industrial area in Bengal.¹⁶³

Much of the basis of the *sardar's* social control of the work force lay in community, kin or other primordial relationships and in the ideas and norms associated with them. For example, it was usual for important up-country *sardars* to build temples or mosques for the workers under them. On this depended a lot of the *sardar's* prestige and authority. Mosques in jute-mill areas are even today named after important *sardars* and stand as monuments to their one-time enormous presence. 'Manbodh sardar ki masjid', 'Birbal sardar ki masjid', 'Ishaque sardar ki masjid' are, to give a few instances, the names

¹⁶² See, for example, the use of this word by Krishnakanta Nandy in his account books of 1787-8 in S. C. Nandy, 'Krishnakanta Nandy's Book of Monthly Accounts of 1195 B.S. (1787-88)', *Bengal Past and Present*, Jan.-June 1980, p. 10. Bishop Heber's *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India from Calcutta to Bombay 1824-1825* (1828) had references to such labourers as 'Sirdar bearers and bearers': Heber quoted in Brajendrachand Bandopadhyay's 'Introduction' to Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay's *Kalikata Kamalalaya* (Calcutta, 1951), p. 21.

¹⁶³ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 1, p. 11.

of three working-class mosques that exist today in the Kankinara area.¹⁶⁴ *Sardari* was thus possibly an instance of a pre-colonial, pre-capitalist institution being adapted to the needs of industrialization in a colony.¹⁶⁵

The *sardar* then embodied contradictory elements of authority. He owed his formal position of being a foreman to the managers and owners of capital and, in that sense, was a functionary in the capitalist production system of the jute mills. He was also different from the traditional village headman of north India in that '*sardar*-ships' could be bought and sold on the market. Yet he was not quite the industrial foreman of nineteenth-century Western Europe whose role 'became increasingly technical' as time passed.¹⁶⁶ *Sardars* were selected not for any technical ability but for 'the authority which they display[ed] over their fellowmen' even before becoming *sardars*.¹⁶⁷ *Tumko apnā sardar kā hukum manna hoga* ('you will have to obey the order of your own *sardar*') was one sentence that the Scottish managers and assistants in the mills were expected to learn in order to use it in dealing with a refractory worker.¹⁶⁸ The sentence brings out the ambiguity of the *sardar*'s authority. His *hukum* (order) was obviously subordinate to yet another imperative ('You will have to'), that of the manager, the representative of capital. But the word *hukum*, once again an ancient word familiar to the north Indian peasant, would have had long and deep resonances within the worker's consciousness and culture.

The legally required factory documents on working-class conditions were thus largely irrelevant to the exercise of the *sardar*'s authority which was in the nature of pre-capitalist domination. He ensured obedience to his *hukum* through means that were either 'illegal' or fell outside the rule of law. His was not the 'disciplinary authority' that Marx outlined in his argument. When the Government

¹⁶⁴ This information comes both from my field investigations and from K.C.R.P., Bengali diary no. 3, entries for 25 Aug. to 28 Nov. 1929.

¹⁶⁵ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. 1, pp. 22–4, describes jobbery as the ubiquitous form of labour recruitment and control in Indian industrialization.

¹⁶⁶ Michelle Perrot, 'The Three Ages of Industrial Discipline in Nineteenth Century France' in John M. Merriman (ed.), *Consciousness and Class Experience in Nineteenth Century Europe* (New York, 1979), p. 159.

¹⁶⁷ *R.C.L.I.*, vol. V, pt. 1, pp. 280, 298. 'Capability, efficiency, services' were the other qualifications required.

¹⁶⁸ Mohiuddin Ahmed, *Essentials of Colloquial Hindustani for Jute Mills and Work-shops* (Calcutta, 1932), p. 89.

of India grafted a disciplinary apparatus of documentation on the culture that supported (and sometimes resisted) the *sardar's* domination, these documents found their own place and meaning within that culture: as additional vehicles of the *sardar's* power and authority. The *sardar* now proved his power by bending rules and falsifying documents. Hence the phenomenon of 'false fines', 'cooked up charges', 'wrongful dismissals', etc. The very exercise of this authority therefore produced 'unreliable' documents.

IX

In conclusion, we may repeat our principal argument. An attempt to write a history of the conditions of the jute mill workers of Calcutta on the basis of documents emanating from the state and the owners of capital invariably reveals certain gaps in our knowledge of these conditions. In this essay we have argued that in so far as that knowledge has a history, the gaps have a history too. In fact it was the same history that produced both the knowledge—enshrined in archival documents—and the gaps which the same documents also contain. An examination of that history (with the aid of an argument borrowed from Marx) led us to investigate the political economy of the industry and the nature of the 'industrial discipline' operative with the mills. The latter question took us into the problem of 'supervision' and working-class notions of 'authority', and hence into the realm of culture.

More on Modes of Power and the Peasantry

PARTHA CHATTERJEE

In an earlier article,¹ I had presented a set of concepts of modes of power and forms of state organization, along with the outlines of an analytical framework, in the context of a study of certain peasant movements and ideologies in twentieth-century Bengal. It has been pointed out to me that this presentation was much too 'cryptic' and that it was disproportionately general in scope in relation to the very specific discussion which followed on Hindu-Muslim riots in the Bengal countryside in the 1920s and 1930s.

It needs to be explained that the conceptual framework presented in the first part of that article was in fact relevant to the analysis of a much wider range of phenomena than Hindu-Muslim riots in Bengal. It is, properly speaking, an attempt at an elementary conceptualization of the general problem of politics and the state in large agrarian societies. I take this opportunity, therefore, to elaborate on some of these general analytical implications of my framework and to point out what I think are the theoretical advantages of using it.

I begin with a consideration of the recent contribution made by Robert Brenner to the debate on the transition from feudalism to capitalism.²

¹ Partha Chatterjee, 'Agrarian Relations and Communalism in Bengal, 1926-1935' in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, vol. I (Delhi, 1982).

² Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe', *Past and Present*, 70 (Feb. 1976), pp. 30-75; 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism', *New Left Review*, 104 (July-Aug. 1977), pp. 25-92; 'Dobb on the Transition from

The Political Question in the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism

Reviewing the contending positions in the earlier Dobb-Sweezy debate,³ Brenner has shown with great clarity that each of the arguments in that debate was based on one form or another of economic determinism. Thus, the process of transition was explained either in terms of the dissolving effect of external trade on an otherwise static feudal economy, or the crisis of rent caused by long-term declines in productivity and by depopulation in feudal agriculture. The unacceptability of the former argument Brenner points out without too much difficulty: it is grounded in the assumption that a transition in modes of production can be explained in its essentials by developments in the sphere of exchange and circulation. Brenner shows this in the course of his discussion of Sweezy's arguments and of the more recent writings of Wallerstein.⁴ The other argument, which was stated with much force by Dobb, hinges on the crucial question of the crisis of seigniorial revenues brought about as a result of the internal contradictions of feudalism and the specific resolution of that crisis. Dobb argued in terms of a single form of resolution: the breakdown of feudal relations in the countryside and the rapid emergence of a superior, i.e. capitalist, mode of production. Brenner shows that this sort of argument is in fact based on a 'determinism', viz. that the *technical* superiority of one mode of production necessarily determines its ultimate victory. It begs the whole question of the specific process of struggle between the contending forces vying for social supremacy, i.e. *the process of class struggle* whose ultimate resolution describes the specific process of transition. Brenner, therefore, states the main theoretical problem of the medieval crisis in the following terms:

. . . on the one hand . . . what was at stake were the fundamental surplus extraction relations which underpinned the ruling class's dominance;

Feudalism to Capitalism', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 2:2 (June 1978), pp. 121-40: mentioned hereafter as Brenner (1976), Brenner (1977) and Brenner (1978) respectively.

³ Now available in Rodney Hilton (ed.), *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London, 1978).

⁴ Brenner (1977).

on the other hand, in the last analysis, the resolution of the crisis through the restrengthening in one form or another of feudal class relations or their dissolution would be decided in terms of the class conflict between lords and peasants, the forms of their class power and their relative strength.⁵

The seigneurial crisis of late feudalism was accompanied by a widespread decline in population all over Europe. How did the rival agrarian classes react to this crisis?

It was the logic of the peasant to try to use his apparently improved bargaining position to get his freedom. It was the logic of the landlord to protect his position by reducing the peasant's freedom. The result simply cannot be explained in terms of demographic-economic supply and demand. It obviously came down to a question of power, indeed of force, and in fact there was intense Europe-wide lord-peasant conflict throughout the later fourteenth, fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, almost everywhere over the same general issues: first, of course, serfdom; secondly, whether lords or peasants were to gain ultimate control over landed property, in particular the vast areas left vacant after the demographic collapse.⁶

And the outcomes were not the same everywhere. Brenner shows this by taking three specific cases: eastern Europe, western Europe and England. In each, the landlords attempted to overcome the rent crisis by increasing controls over the peasantry. In eastern Europe, controls were in fact successfully strengthened. In western Europe, peasants won freedom from serfdom, in fact obtained freehold rights over much of the land, while the aristocracy sought to reorganize its position through the medium of the absolutist state. In England, serfdom collapsed, although landlords retained control of the land. 'To account for the foregoing divergences would require an account of the differential evolution of lord-peasant class relations which lay behind the differential outcomes of class conflicts in the different European regions.' This, in turn, would require an inquiry 'into the sources of class solidarity and power of the peasantry, especially in

⁵ Brenner (1978), p. 127. It could be argued that Brenner has been somewhat unfair to Dobb in his charge that Dobb had overlooked the class struggle aspect of the transition. The point, however, is that in spite of a masterly *empirical* presentation of this evidence, Dobb did not incorporate the class struggle as an integral part of his fundamental *theory* of the transition.

⁶ Brenner (1976), p. 51.

their village communities, and of the lords, especially in their military organization and above all their state'.⁷

It is clear, therefore, that the whole question of the specific form of transition is here extricated from the bog of techno-economic determinism—depopulation, declines in productivity, dissolving impacts of external trade, etc. etc.—and posed as a problem of politics, i.e. of the class struggle.

The element of 'indeterminacy' emerges in relation to the different character and results of these conflicts in different regions. This is not to say that such outcomes are somehow arbitrary, but rather that they tended to be bound up with certain *historically specific* patterns of development of the contending agrarian classes and their relative strength in the different European societies: their relative levels of internal solidarity, their self-consciousness and organisation, and their general political resources—especially their relationships to the non-agricultural classes (in particular, potential urban class allies) and to the state (in particular, whether or not the state developed as a 'class-like' competitor of the lords for the peasants' surplus).⁸

Brenner, in fact, goes further than this and considers historical examples of certain specific configurations of this triad, viz. landlord, peasant and the state, and the specific resolutions of the ensuing power struggles: in east Elbian Germany, west Elbian Germany, France and England. In the first case, landlords successfully increased controls because the peasant communities were weak and there were virtually no independent political institutions in the village, which in turn is attributable to the leadership of the landlords rather than of peasants in the colonization of the eastern lands. The medieval crisis therefore led to a new serfdom. In western Germany, the peasant-communal organizations of the *Gemeinde* were by the late middle ages far stronger in the economic regulation and political self-government of village life—the peasantry there was engaged in a constant struggle against the lords to perfect its common rights, such as the common lands and the common-field organization of agricultural rotation. The peasants then went on to demand reductions in rent and the right to inheritance, to replace the landlord-installed village mayors by their own elected magistrates and to choose their own village priest. The lords were forced to accept the institutional-

⁷ Brenner (1977), p. 129.

⁸ Brenner (1976), p. 52.

ization of these rights won by the peasantry in the form of village charters (*Weistümer*). In France, too, the peasantry resisted the landlords and won similar rights, but the absolutist state emerged as a contender to landlord power: it intervened on behalf of the peasantry to reduce landlords' rents and to protect peasant proprietorship in order to tax the peasants' surplus. Paradoxically (though not surprisingly), the state now replaced the landlords as the target of peasant revolts. There were, in fact, similar developments in the 'mini-absolutisms' of the west German princes. In England, on the other hand, the peasantry fought successfully against serfdom, but the landlords responded by taking as much land as possible from the 'customary sector' and adding it on to the 'leasehold sector' where they brought in capitalist tenants who made improvements and cultivated by wage labour. It was the emergence of this landlord-capitalist tenant-wage labour structure which ultimately demolished peasant proprietorship and ushered in capitalist development in England.

By contrasting these four specific cases, Brenner is able to suggest that there can be more than one possible resolution of the landlord-peasant-state tussle which is the political form of the feudal crisis. Only under two specific conditions is the outcome directed unambiguously towards capitalist development: 'on the one hand, the destruction of serfdom; on the other hand, the short-circuiting of the emerging predominance of small peasant property'.⁹

But what Brenner's contribution brings out above all is the theoretical importance of locating the element of 'indeterminacy' in the transition problem in the specific *political* form of the class struggle. Brenner has been able to demonstrate convincingly that the path of transition is not uniquely determined by the techno-economic terms of evolution of a certain mode of production. The problem now is to define the theoretical terms in which this *political* question of the transition problem can be attacked.

The task requires new theoretical categories. It is now widely accepted that the political structures of society (with the possible exceptions only of the most elementary forms of social organization in early or 'primitive' communities—but here the problems are of a different sort) are not mere reflections of its 'economic' structures built around the activities of social production. There are institutions,

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

and instituted processes, of power and of ideology which intervene and give the political structures a certain *relative autonomy*. But merely to state this is to stop short of posing a crucial problematic: what precisely constitutes 'relative autonomy'? Where is it located? How are we to identify and describe it in the domain of our theoretical concepts? Put in other words, what are the theoretical concepts and analytical relations which are specific to the world of the political? What Brenner has been able to suggest are certain empirical patterns among political phenomena connected with a limited number of historical examples of transition from one mode of production to another. What are the distinctive categories with the help of which specific political problems such as peasant struggles, feudal domination or the constitution of the absolutist state can be posed within a general framework of theory?

To generalize: we now possess a reasonably strong theoretical framework built around the central concept of the mode of production for the analysis of historical-material processes in human society. The mode of production has been defined¹⁰ as an articulated combination of three elements—labourer, non-labourer and means of production—combined according to both a 'property' connection (the relations of production) and a 'real appropriation' connection (the forces of production). The problem of historical analysis is to study how the combination of these three elements changes in terms of the two connections. Now, the 'real appropriation' connection is the specific field of social production in its techno-economic aspects, for the study of which there are appropriate categories and analytical relations. What we are concerned with here are the categories and relations relevant to the analysis of the 'property' connection, i.e. the question of rights or entitlements in society, of the resultant power relationships, of law and politics, of the process of legitimation of power relations, etc. I will now attempt an elementary categorization of some of these concepts.

The Modes of Power

Let me first repeat the definitions I had presented in the earlier essay.¹¹

¹⁰ Étienne Balibar, 'On the Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism', in L. Althusser and E. Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London, 1970), pp. 201-308, esp. pp. 212-16.

¹¹ 'Agrarian Relations and Communalism', section II.

I defined three *modes of power* which could exist, even coexist, in a particular state formation. These modes are distinguished in terms of the *basis* of specification of the 'property' connection (the relations of production) in the ordered and repeated performance of social activities, i.e. the particular pattern of allocation of rights or entitlements over material objects (sometimes extended to non-material objects such as knowledge) within a definite system of social production. The three modes of power I called the *communal*, the *feudal* and the *bourgeois* modes.

The *communal* mode of power exists where individual or sectional rights, entitlements and obligations are allocated on the authority of the entire social collectivity, i.e. the community. Here the collective is prior; individual or sectional identities are derived only by virtue of membership of the community. Institutionally, there may be various forms in which such authority could be exercised. It may consist of an assembly of all members of the community, but this is by no means a necessary institutional form. Communal authority may be exercised through a council of elders or of leading families, or even by a chief or patriarch. The point is that authority resides not in the person or even in the office; it resides only in the community as a whole. The officials or councils are no more than mere functionaries. We will see later that the communal mode of power may be said to exist even in situations where there is no definite or recognizable institutional form for the exercise of such authority.

The *feudal* mode of power is characterized fundamentally by sheer superiority of physical force, i.e. a relationship of domination. It is founded on conquest or some other means of physical subordination of a subject population. In our conception, it denotes not just the state formation which accompanies the feudal mode of production, but may in fact serve to describe political institutions corresponding to a whole range of forms of organization or production based on direct physical control over the life-processes of the producers. At one extreme, one may have production by slaves where both the life-processes of the producers as well as the labour-process itself are controlled by the master; at the other extreme, one can think of a free peasantry which is only required to make a periodic tax payment or a regular tribute to the agent of an external state; and in between there could be various degrees of serfdom, involving different degrees of control over the life-processes of the peasantry as a means of collecting

a part of the social product as rent. The political domination which in all these forms of production organization is the prerequisite of rights or claims on the social product we will classify under the feudal mode of power.

In the *bourgeois* mode of power, unlike in the feudal, the domination of non-producers, i.e. capitalists, over the producers, i.e. wage-labourers, and the appropriation of surplus-value are assured not by physical control over the life-processes of the producers but by complete control over the labour-process secured by rights of property in the means of production and in the product and by the impersonal operation of the market. The necessary political conditions for the full development of capitalism as a system of social production requires, therefore, the separation of the state from the sphere of civil society, the elevation of the state into a 'neutral' institution which does not recognize real inequalities in society, making the individual the unit in political and legal transactions, conceiving of society as the result of a contract between individuals, turning all individuals irrespective of differences of race, religion, language, education or wealth into equal subjects before law. The fundamental institutional form by which the bourgeoisie sustains its political domination is that of representative government.

The rest of this essay will be concerned with an elaboration of some of the ways in which this conceptual framework can be used in the historical analysis of state formations and political processes. I will take various illustrative examples drawn from different regions of the world and different periods of history in order to emphasize the advantages as well as the difficulties of using these concepts for an understanding of the peasantry in history.

Community and Statel-ssness

I avoid, for reasons of space, an explicit discussion of the formulations in Engels' classic *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*.¹² The similarities and differences in approach will be evident from my arguments.

Within the domain of theory, the community is a conceptualization of the *first* instituted form of collective social authority. It is thus logically *prior* to a conceptualization of the state as a machinery of

¹² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1973), pp. 191-334.

repression, as the instituted form of exploitative power relations in society. I hasten to add that this theoretical ordering does not require the support of any historicist conception of all human social groups passing through the successive stages: stateless anarchy→communal social organization→state.¹³

If one is looking for appropriate historical evidence having a bearing on this formulation (although it is worth reminding ourselves of the *logical* status of the concept of community within a theory of state formations), the community can be identified in its most *concretely expressed* form in anthropological studies of 'tribal' groups. Many such studies, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, have revealed the existence of 'tribal' communities which apparently do not possess a state apparatus or distinctly identifiable political structures differentiated from the social group at large. The idiom of group solidarity here is often kinship, whether real, or imagined and imputed. In some of these cases, a number of local lineages are combined into a village community to comprise the smallest political segment; a number of villages united in a regional confederacy defines the tribe or people. These are usually categorized in anthropological literature as 'segmentary lineage systems' and there exists a theory about how such societies are regulated in the absence of centralized political structures or ranked and specialized holders of political authority. This explanation rests on 'the relations of local groups to one another', which, in this theory, 'are seen as a balance of power, maintained by competition between them'. Thus,

Corporate groups may be arranged hierarchically in a series of levels; each group is significant in different circumstances and in connection with different social activities—economic, ritual and governmental. Relations at one level are competitive in one situation, but in another the formerly competitive groups merge in mutual alliance against an outside group. . . . The aggregates that emerge as units in one context are merged into larger aggregates in others, so that a segment that in one situation is independent finds that it and its former competitors are merged together as subordinate

¹³ It is instructive to note the remark of an anthropologist who, in an attempt to put into a comparative framework the results of anthropological researches on tribal state organizations, has shown a similar concern to avoid this historicism. Gluckman discusses the difficulties of postulating 'a single evolutionary development for each tribal-type society into a differentiated society', but then adds: '... it is certain that the tribal-type antedated the differentiated society in the whole march of human history.' Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Oxford, 1965), p. 81.

segments in the internal administrative organisation of a wider overall segment that includes them both. This wider segment is in turn in external competitive relations with other similar segments, and there may be an entire series of such segments.¹⁴

In the original formulation by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard,¹⁵ these segments were corporate lineages, and the classic studies of such segmentary lineage systems were of the Nuer of Sudan, the Tallensi of Ghana,¹⁶ the Tiv of northern Nigeria, the Mandari and the Dinka of southern Sudan, the Amba of Uganda, the Konkomba of Togo and the Lugbura of the Uganda-Congo region.¹⁷ But there have also been studies of politically uncentralized societies in which there are no corporate lineages,¹⁸ but corporate authority is vested in age-set or age-grade systems, such as among the Kikuyu and the Kamba of Kenya,¹⁹ or in village councils as among the Kalabari, Bonny and Okrika of eastern Nigeria.²⁰

¹⁴ John Middleton and David Tait, 'Introduction' in Middleton and Tait (eds.), *Tribes Without Rulers: Studies in African Segmentary Systems* (London, 1958), pp. 1-32.

¹⁵ M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 'Introduction' in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African Political Systems* (London, 1940), pp. 1-24.

¹⁶ The studies by Evans-Pritchard and Fortes in *ibid.*

¹⁷ Studies by Laura Bohannan, Jean Buxton, Geoffrey Lienhart, Edward Winter, David Tait and John Middleton in Middleton and Tait, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ M. G. Smith, in an early critique of the segmentary lineage theory, pointed out its limited applicability even in the 'tribal' situation: '. . . the foundation of segmentary theory consists in a combination of two basic concepts, segmentation as a structure and process on the one hand, and political organization on the other. Where these conceptions are combined with unilineal descent groupings, segmentary lineages exist, otherwise they do not.' He pointed out that there were 'tribal' societies lacking specialized organs of administration in which the segments were not lineages, but localities or age-sets or cult-groups. Smith, of course, carried forward the argument to contend, in the manner of the 'political systems' theorists, that all political processes involved segmentation and all administrative organization involved hierarchy and that, therefore, 'the old problem of "states" and "stateless societies" is largely spurious. . . . In a real sense, therefore, the distinction . . . reduces to variability in combination and degree of explicitness in hierarchic organisation, differentiation of governmental units in terms of political and administrative functions and the variable distribution of these functions among Corporations Aggregate or Sole, organised with varying degrees of explicitness.' But a critical discussion of this last part of Smith's argument would require a long digression. M. G. Smith, 'On Segmentary Lineage Systems', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 86:2 (July-Dec. 1956), pp. 39-80.

¹⁹ John Middleton, *The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya* (London, 1953).

²⁰ G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers* (London, 1963).

The most interesting cases are of groups in which there exist official functionaries, such as chiefs or elders or lineage heads or priests for the performance of various administrative and other regulatory acts. There may be petty chieftains who perform routinized, often ritualized, official duties but have no special privileges. The Shilluk in Sudan have kings who are merely symbols of communal unity but have no authority.²¹ And then there is the phenomenon of the 'big man' who has great personal influence because others defer to him for his personal qualities—wisdom, valour or magical powers—or because they are obliged to him in some way. Sometimes there is an institutionalized role for the stranger who acts as a mediator.²² At other times, parallel to the institution of chiefship, there is an earth cult and there are priests who act as 'custodians of the earth': the ritual of the earth cult specifies the respective position of each structural unit with respect to the other and also symbolizes the unity of the whole community.²³ Chiefdom of a more advanced kind emerges in a larger confederation of 'tribal' groups. Here there is a ranking, because the chief or his descent group is superior to the rest.²⁴

But in most of these cases where there are recognized official functionaries, there is a simultaneous institutionalization of the authority of the community as a whole, in the form of a council or even an assembly of all members which has to be summoned on occasions that require extraordinary decisions falling outside the routine competence of the functionaries. The Mandari of Sudan have hereditary chiefs, but the chief's judgements are only the expression of the views of the council of elders.²⁵ The Ngwato of Botswana have chiefs but 'all matters of

²¹ Gluckman, *op. cit.*, p. 130 ff.

²² This 'becomes more significant when previously hostile tribes have had to unite against foreign domination. Then some outsider, not occupying a role of authority in established systems, arises as prophet, backed with supernatural powers, to unite the previously warring groups. This has happened in several areas of Africa: among the Nuer, among the tribes of the Cape Province of South Africa, in East and Central Africa.' *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²³ See, for example, M. Fortes, 'The Political System of the Tallensi of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast', in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, *op. cit.* pp. 239-71.

²⁴ Among the Bemba, for instance, the chiefly clan is like a superior caste. Audrey I. Richards, 'The Political Systems of the Bemba Tribe—North-Eastern Rhodesia', *ibid.*, pp. 83-120. Among the Zulus the king's family formed a superior rank; the close relatives of various chiefs were the aristocracy in the chief's tribe. Max Gluckman, 'The Kingdom of the Zulu of South Africa', *ibid.*, pp. 25-55.

²⁵ Jean Buxton, 'The Mandari of the Southern Sudan', in Tait and Middleton, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-95.

tribal policy are dealt with finally before a general assembly of the adult men in the chief's *kgotla* (council-place).²⁶

Theoretically, it is legitimate to distinguish societies of this kind having recognized offices of authoritative functionaries, including advanced chiefdoms, from class society proper because chiefdom may still not necessarily imply an institutionalized claim on the social surplus based on political domination, i.e. the ability to coerce. Generally speaking, the distinctive features of the social organization of production in this situation are set by the low level of techniques, low productivity and the lack of any substantial quantity of social surplus. Mere subsistence and the simplest forms of social reproduction require considerable co-operation and mutual aid in productive activities and substantial communal control of consumption, sexual relations and indeed of the overall life-process itself. But perhaps the most crucial consideration which defines and shapes the form of communal political authority in stateless 'tribal' societies is the need for protection against external threat. 'The tribal superstructure', writes Sahlins, 'is a political arrangement, a pattern of alliances and enmities, its design shaped by tactical considerations. Overarching relations of clanship or regional confederacy seem most compelled by competitive threats, in connection with which large-scale economic and ritual co-operation may play the derivative role of underwriting cohesion in the face of external dangers'.²⁷ Thus, the need to order the internal life and labour-process of the community as well as the

²⁶ I. Schapera, 'The Political Organisation of the Ngwata of Bechuanaland Protectorate', in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, op. cit., pp. 56-82

²⁷ Marshall D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1968), p. 17. Sahlins also notes 'the general propensity of tribal peoples to cloak alliances of convenience in kinship garb. Where peace is necessary or desirable, kinship is extended to effect it.' Ibid., p. 11. It is curious that in order to put this idea into a more general framework of the evolution of state institutions, Sahlins has to borrow his political theory from Hobbes. His view of this development is one from a state of 'Warre' where 'force is held in severalty' to 'Peace' where it is held in a sovereign body which has sole legitimate monopoly of force. But surely the most distinctive premise on which the Hobbesian theory is based is that of warring *individuals* and not communities already united in bonds of solidarity. The idea of individual members of society entering into a contract and passing on all coercive powers into the hands of a sovereign or sovereign body is fundamentally antithetical to the notion of communal authority. Perhaps this confusion of categories in Sahlins has to do with his attempt to generalize and elevate into a 'domestic mode of production' the Chayanovian idea of self-sufficient and jealously self-centred peasant households. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London, 1979).

requirements of evolving a viable organization of communal defence against external attack create the conditions for the institutionalization of communal authority.

Feudal Power and Institutionalized Coercion

We can think of at least four distinct processes by which institutions of power based on force, and hence an institutionalized claim by a few on a part of the social surplus, can emerge. First, there could occur, as a process internal to the historical development of the community, a transformation of the offices of communal authority into institutions of feudal power. Thus, chiefs, warriors, priests or literati who had earlier performed as commissioners of communal power could, because of changes either in the conditions of production or in the external political environment, begin to wield coercive force on the rest of the community of producers in order to claim a part of the surplus. This, of course, is a historical process of transition for which it is impossible to set empirical thresholds or temporal datelines to demarcate the passage from stateless communal authority to feudal dominion. One historical example we could consider is provided by E. A. Thompson²⁸ who compares the historical accounts left by Caesar and Tacitus to show how in the first century B.C., at the time of Caesar, the German tribes (*pagi*) had no peacetime authority, such as a chieftain, with powers over all the clans which made up a people (*civitas*), although there were war councils of tribal leaders at the time of war. By the first century A.D., however, Tacitus observed that the Germans had a permanent council of leading men to deal with matters of minor importance affecting the people as a whole, while most weighty business was decided by an assembly of warriors. But now there was also a new kind of chief whom Tacitus calls 'king' (*rex*) who was elected from within a 'royal clan'. Yet, Thompson notes that in spite of the king and 'the growing inequalities of economic power and social standing among the Germans of the first century A.D.,' the assembly of free tribesmen was still the sovereign body. In the majority of cases, the assembly's decisions 'must have been reached more or less unanimously, for there was no peaceable means by which a substantial minority of the people could have been coerced into a course of action which they strongly disapproved: there was even in Tacitus' time no public and coercive authority over and above the people themselves.'²⁹

²⁸ E. A. Thompson, *The Early Germans* (Oxford, 1965).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-5.

Thompson's account suggests a process by which the continuous pressure of warfare not only creates relatively permanent institutions of specialized coercive authority within a community, but also creates the *conditions* for converting these offices into seats of feudal power. The second, and more direct, method by which this could happen is, of course, the obvious one of conquest of one people by another. Where conquest is followed by direct domination by the conquering group over a subject population, and the institutionalization of exploitative relations in the formal delineation of rights, there is little problem for historical analysis. But the analysis often becomes complicated because of the complex formations one encounters in historical examples of societies in which there have been conquests, often successive waves of conquests, by other peoples. One does nonetheless find in anthropological studies examples even in politically uncentralized societies of freeborn and slave lineages, often attributable to conquest, with clearly recognized economic and ritual relations of dominance between the two categories, sometimes including direct payments in terms of labour.³⁰ It has also been pointed out recently that much of the conventional anthropological literature, guided by an almost obsessive concern to unravel the procedural and symbolic intricacies of the balancing mechanisms in segmentary political systems, has missed the very real exploitative relations which characterize the social formations of most extant 'tribal' peoples. Many of these relations are in fact the result of the domination imposed by conquering groups. Frankenberg, for instance, has reanalysed the political relations of the Lozi tribe, earlier studied by Gluckman, and has shown that as a result of a history of conquests, the Lozi have secured exclusive 'ownership' of the mound gardens which give them a crucial advantage in the sharing of productive resources among the peoples of Barotseland, and have thus ensured their domination over other peoples in the region.³¹

³⁰ Among the Bonny and Kalabari peoples of eastern Nigeria, for example, the 'tribe' is divided into freeborn and slaves, and the membership of village councils is confined only to the freeborn. G. I. Jones, *op. cit.* Also see Jack Goody, 'Land Tenure and Feudalism in Africa', in Z. A. Konczacki and J. M. Konczacki (eds.), *An Economic History of Tropical Africa*, vol. 1 (London, 1977), pp. 62-9.

³¹ Ronald Frankenberg, 'Economic Anthropology or Political Economy? The Barotse Social Formation—A Case Study', in John Clammer (ed.), *The New Economic Anthropology* (London, 1978), pp. 31-60. Also see Y. Lacoste, 'General Characteristics and Fundamental Structures of Medieval North African Society', *Economy and Society*, 3:1 (February 1974), pp. 1-17; David Seddon, 'Economic Anthropology or Political Economy? Approaches to the Analysis of Pre-capitalist Formations in the Maghreb', in Clammer (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 61-109.

This sort of dominance by conquest can also take the form—and this, in general terms, is the third possible form in which feudal power relations can emerge—of a simple tribute-extracting relation in which the social formation of the subject people is left largely intact, including its own internal constitution of authority which may, in fact, continue to retain a segmentary character. This, sometimes, is the form found in historical examples of large kingdoms with well-developed productive and state organizations attempting to extend their domination over more ‘primitive’ peoples living in peripheral regions.

And finally, of course, we have the familiar case, usually the consequence of a long and complex historical process involving a combination of ‘internal’ development and external political intervention over centuries, of the breakdown of segmentary forms of social organization, the evolution of more developed techno-economic forms and more complex social arrangements of production, the emergence of differentiated and institutionalized forms of extraction and distribution of the surplus, and the creation of formal institutions of coercive domination. This, properly speaking, is the typical situation in which one encounters the peasantry in history.

Now, while it seems convenient for analytical purposes to distinguish between these separate processes of the emergence and establishment of regular exploitative class relations based on sheer superiority of physical force, one would rarely find concrete historical examples of social formations in which these specific processes can be delineated with any degree of accuracy. In other words, it seems on the whole futile to attempt concrete historical analyses of either ‘tribal’ or peasant societies by *positing* a framework of unilineal transition from some kind of ‘primitive communism’ to class-divided society. A more useful approach would be to locate *all* pre-capitalist political formations in a historical process of which the central dynamic is to be found in the dialectical opposition between the communal and the feudal modes of power. Let me elaborate.

The Opposition Between Communal and Feudal Modes of Power in ‘Transitions’ to Feudalism

A common problem one comes across in the literature on political arrangements in ‘tribal’ societies is that of deciding when ‘state institutions’ have emerged. One approach to the problem is, so to

speak, to postpone its solution by constructing a set of evolutionary *stages* in the process of the emergence of fully developed state institutions, and placing all societies which appeared to lack formal structures and that cannot unequivocally be designated as state formations, in one or the other of these stages. Thus, Elman Service subdivides the case studies in his book on the subject according to the 'societal levels' of band, tribe, chiefdom and 'primitive-state'.³² Needless to say, classificatory schemes of this kind are entirely arbitrary: one can insert other stages in between any two, or lump together two or more stages and call them one. Besides, by refusing to designate as 'state' institutions all regular arrangements of exercise of class power which cannot be defined in terms of some positive criteria such as territory or legitimate monopoly of force, one naturally tends to overlook in studies of societies otherwise characterized by 'segmentary' forms of authority the process of emergence of exploitative class relations. This has, in fact, been a major argument in recent critiques of conventional anthropological methods. Fundamentally, the problem lies in the futility of trying to capture a *process* of change within a framework defined by a set of mutually exclusive positive categories.

The problem is highlighted in the work of anthropologists who, faced with incontrovertible evidence of the existence of regular processes of class domination in 'tribal' societies, have attempted to incorporate this into their conventional positivist framework. Aidan Southall, for instance, studying 'processes of domination' among the Alur people of East Africa,³³ found two contrary principles of authority—one based on kinship, i.e. authority and order within lineages and clans built upon values inculcated in the family, and then spreading outwards through the agnatic core of brothers, father and sons to embrace all kinsmen of corporate lineages or the clan section, and the other political, stemming from chiefship and delegated downwards to chieflets and the heads of corporate lineages or clan sections. The kinship authority system retained considerable responsibility for the provision of personal security and the regulation of day-to-day social relation-

³² Elman R. Service, *Profiles in Ethnology* (New York, 1978).

³³ Aidan W. Southall, *Alur Society: A Study in Processes and Types of Domination* (Cambridge, 1953).

ships. But the society also had chiefs who not only acted as the main centres of a system for the reciprocal exchange of goods and services but also obtained fines and tributes in kind as well as in services. The system of political authority was a flexible one with much responsibility left to the heads of local groups, while the chief stepped in to reinforce their authority 'when directly called upon by them, or when violent and unresolved disorders required his intervention'.

Alur chiefs did not enforce any rigidly defined authority within strict territorial frontiers. They relied mainly on the general influence of their ritual and supernatural authority to bring them tribute and services required to maintain themselves and the economic system of which they were the pivots, and to secure reasonable conformity to the minimal requirements of order and justice, in which the strictness of the regulations and the certainty of their enforcement diminished somewhat from the centre to the periphery of the jurisdiction. They had no military organisation to oppose against direct challenge to their political authority. But they could usually rely on the loyalty of a sufficient number of clan sections to muster an extempore force stronger than any that was likely to challenge them, and they had a miscellaneous body of dependents, closely tied to them by economic privileges, who could provide an informal body-guard.³⁴

In trying to square this evidence with the conceptual framework of 'segmentary lineage systems', Southall then finds it necessary to invent the hybrid concept of the 'segmentary state'.³⁵ This he describes as follows:

(1) Territorial sovereignty is recognised but limited and essentially relative, forming a series of zones in which authority is almost absolute near the centre and increasingly restricted towards the periphery, often shading off into a ritual hegemony. (2) There is centralised government, yet there are also numerous peripheral foci of administration over which the centre exercises only a limited control. (3) There is a specialised administrative staff at the centre, but is repeated on a reduced scale at all the peripheral

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³⁵ It is interesting to note what Southall has to say about his methodological problem: 'The distinction between state and segmentary organisation is theoretically valid, and at this abstract level intermediate forms demand no separate category. But in any scheme of classification which claims empirical relevance the criteria of legitimate isolation are different, and any empirical form which has a certain frequency, stability, and structural consistency must receive due consideration. The morphologically transitional is not necessarily the empirically transitional form.' *Ibid.*, p. 246. Positivism and empiricism go hand in hand!

foci of administration. (4) Monopoly of the use of force is successfully claimed to a limited extent and within a limited range by the central authority, but legitimate force of a more restricted order inheres at all the peripheral foci. (5) Several levels of subordinate foci may be distinguishable, organised pyramidally in relation to the central authority . . . (6) The more peripheral a subordinate authority is the more chance it has to change its allegiance from one power pyramid to another . . .³⁶

It then turns out that not only a large number of African societies, but several feudal states in Europe, India and China as well, were segmentary states! All the above characteristics of a 'segmentary' distribution of power could be seen in the political organization of these ancient and medieval kingdoms:

For, until the central authority can prove its efficacy to the average individual in terms of personal security, the individual must cling to kin or other traditional local units, and even to feudal authorities, in such a way that the distribution of power is segmentary in type.³⁷

Let us overlook the rather crude psychologism of the last formulation. The important point is that after looking at the wide range of empirical evidence from 'tribal' as well as 'feudal' agrarian societies, Southall has noticed a common feature—the coexistence of two contrary principles of political authority, one based on kinship, the other on domination. He has not, of course, succeeded in locating this finding within a theory of the historical process of change in political formations. A much more remarkable anthropological study is the one by Leach on the Kachin people of upper Burma.³⁸ Kachin society is simultaneously segmentary and class-stratified: the lineage segmentation does not lead to 'balanced opposition' as in the theory of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, but rather to a status ranking between superior and inferior. The way in which this happens involves a conflict between two ideal constitutions of the social order—one based on the principle of kinship and the other on the principle of rank. The *gumsa* system of ranking means a status differentiation between the chief and his followers. Ideally, it means a system of reciprocal obligations, but 'the weakness of the *gumsa* system is that the successful chief is tempted to repudiate links of kinship with his

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 248-9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

³⁸ E. R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (London, 1954).

followers and to treat them as if they were bond slaves (*mayam*)'.³⁹ When this happens, the contrary principle of *gumlao* can be invoked by the commoners to justify revolt against the chief. In the *gumlao* constitution, there are no chiefs and all lineages are of the same rank. Yet, the historical evidence seems to show that after a successful revolt and a period of egalitarian *gumlao* regime, '*gumlao* groups . . . seem to revert rather rapidly to class differentiation on a lineage basis . . .'⁴⁰

Generally speaking, then, Leach describes the political system of the Kachin as one of oscillation between two opposed poles ideally defined in the *gumsa* and the *gumlao*. 'A *gumsa* political state tends to develop features which lead to rebellion, resulting, for a time, in a *gumlao* order. But a *gumlao* community, unless it happens to be centred around a fixed territorial centre such as a patch of irrigated rice terraces, usually lacks the means to hold its component lineages together in a status of equality. It will then either disintegrate altogether through fission, or else status differentiation between lineage groups will bring the system back into the *gumsa* pattern.'⁴¹

Leach also identified a third ideal pattern which the *gumsa* form tends to imitate, viz. the much more overtly 'feudal' pattern of the Shan principalities: when the Kachin chiefs have the opportunity, they model their behaviour on that of the Shan princes. But what is more interesting is Leach's claim that the two contrary poles between which the Kachin political system oscillates are not merely abstract categories constructed by the anthropologist, but ideal types that are recognized as such in Kachin society.⁴²

Leach also points out that while certain features of Kachin society are clearly similar to the classical segmentary type, or to Morgan's 'gentile' organization as among the Iroquois or the ancient Greeks, it is also different in that it has a distinct class system associated with a lineage system. In this respect, it is 'only half a step removed' from neighbouring Shan society which resembles much more strongly what is commonly understood as feudalism. 'The transition from Kachin-type organisation to Shan-type organisation involves the substitution of a straight landlord-tenant relationship for a relation-

³⁹ Ibid., p. 203.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 203.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 204.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 285-6.

ship based either on common lineage or affinal dependence.⁴³ What Leach does not point out is that the opposition between the two contrary principles of organization of power and authority is an integral aspect of political formations even in feudal society proper.

Marx on the 'Original' Forms of Property

Let us turn to Marx's discussion in the *Grundrisse* on precapitalist formations. There are several pages here on what Marx calls the 'original forms of property and production'. The broad range of these forms Marx sets out in terms of two extremes—small, free landed property on the one hand, and 'communal landownership resting on the Oriental commune' on the other. In all the forms falling within this range, 'the worker relates to the objective conditions of his labour as to his property; this is the natural unity of labour with its material presuppositions.'

The worker thus has an objective existence independent of labour. The individual relates to himself as proprietor, as master of the conditions of his reality. He relates to the others in the same way and—depending on whether this *presupposition* is posited as proceeding from the community or from the individual families which constitute the commune—he relates to the others as co-proprietors, as so many incarnations of the common property, or as independent proprietors like himself, independent private proprietors—beside whom the previously all-absorbing and all-predominant communal property is itself posited as a particular *ager publicus* alongside the many private landowners.⁴⁴

Marx then gives illustrations of several of these 'original forms of property' that may occur within this range. In the first of these forms, 'an initial, naturally arisen spontaneous community appears as first presupposition'.

Family, and the family extended as a clan, or through intermarriage between families, or combination of clans This naturally arisen clan community, or, if one will, pastoral society, is the first presupposition—the communality of blood, language, customs—for the *appropriation of the objective conditions* of their life, and of their life's reproducing and objectifying activity (activity as herdsmen, hunters, tillers etc.). The earth is the great workshop, the arsenal which furnishes both means and material of labour, as well as the seat, the *base* of the community. They relate naively to it as the *property of the community*, of the community producing

⁴³ Ibid., p. 288.

⁴⁴ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, tr. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 471.

and reproducing itself in living labour. Each individual conducts himself only as a link, as a member of this community as *proprietor* or *possessor*. The *real appropriation* through the labour process happens under these *presuppositions*, which are not themselves the *product* of labour, but appear as its natural or *divine* presuppositions.⁴⁵

Now, 'with the same land-relation as its foundation', this form of property can 'realize itself' in many different ways. There could be little communities existing side by side, with individual families working independently on the plots assigned to them: the only part of their labour which is kept aside is for such purely communal expenses as 'war, religion etc.' and a certain communal reserve for purposes of insurance. On the other hand, there could be a communality of labour itself, as, says Marx, in Mexico or Peru, or among the early Celts or a few clans of India. Again, communality can appear in the form of the chief of a clan, or as a council of patriarchs. That is to say, the specific organization of communal authority associated with this form of property can have various forms—relatively more despotic or relatively more democratic. It could even appear, 'as in most of the Asiatic land forms', as a comprehensive unity standing above all the little communities, a unity represented in the person of the despot who appears as the sole proprietor of the land and the little communities of producers merely as hereditary producers. Here, the surplus product, 'determined by law in consequence of the real appropriation through labour', goes as tribute to this highest entity.⁴⁶

The second 'original' form of property Marx describes is the 'ancient' form. Here too the community is the 'first presupposition', but the difference is that the base of the community is not the countryside but the town: 'the cultivated field here appears as a *territorium* belonging to the town'. The major communal activity

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 472.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 472-3. It is somewhat distressing to find even in recent writings extended discussions on the 'reality' of 'communal ownership' in pre-capitalist societies. Obviously, a mercantile notion of property rights in land is irrelevant in pre-capitalist formations, and Paul Bohannan, writing about land rights in pre-colonial Africa, quite correctly dismisses such a notion as 'silly'. He also shows that it was *after* the colonial penetration that the history of landed property in Africa was written on the basis of such a definition of 'communal ownership', doubtless to suit specific colonial interests. Paul Bohannan, 'Africa's Land' in George Dalton (ed.), *Tribal and Peasant Economies* (Garden City, N. Y., 1967), pp. 51-60.

here is war, 'the great communal labour which is required either to occupy the objective conditions of being there alive, or to protect and perpetuate the occupation'. The community here is therefore 'a negative unity towards the outside'.

The commune—as state—is, on one side, the relation of these free and equal private proprietors to one another, their bond against the outside, and is at the same time their safeguard. The commune here rests as much on the fact that its members consist of working landed proprietors, small-owning peasants, as the peasants' independence rests on their mutual relations as commune members, on protection of the *ager publicus* for communal needs and communal glory etc. Membership in the commune remains the presupposition for the appropriation of land and soil, but, as a member of the commune, the individual is a private proprietor. He relates to his private property as land and soil, but at the same time as to his being as commune member; and his own sustenance as such is likewise the sustenance of the commune, and conversely etc.⁴⁷

The third form is the 'Germanic'. Here neither is the commune member a co-possessor of the commune property as in the Oriental form, nor is there a separation between state property and private property as in classical antiquity. Rather, the commune exists only in the actual 'coming-together' of the individual members in an assembly. The individual households here are in fact independent centres of production, and the commune and communal property appear as forms 'mediated by, i.e. as a relation of, the independent subjects to one another.'⁴⁸

It is clear then that there can be several empirical variants of the 'original form of property'. Moreover, there is no difficulty if later historical or anthropological research persuades us to extend, amend or even reject Marx's descriptions of some of these specific historical variants, or to add new ones to his list. The fundamental theoretical criterion on which the conceptualization of the 'original form' depends is the *presupposition* of a community; all allocation of social rights, i.e. of property, proceeds from this presupposition; the objective mode of existence of the labouring individual—his relation to land and to all the conditions of his labour—is thus mediated by his existence as member of this community. Many specific variations of this objective mode of existence, and hence of the concrete forms of

⁴⁷ *Grundrisse*, p. 475.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 477-84.

'communal property', are possible. The evolution of each of these would depend 'partly on the natural inclinations of the tribe, and partly on the economic conditions in which it relates as proprietor to the land and soil in reality, i.e. in which it appropriates its fruits through labour, and the latter will itself depend on climate, physical make-up of the land and soil, the physically determined mode of its exploitation, the relation with hostile tribes or neighbour tribes, and the modifications which migrations, historic experiences etc. introduce.'⁴⁹

It is also clear now that any conceptualization of exploitative class relations, e.g. slavery or serfdom, requires as a *theoretical presupposition* the logical existence of a concept of 'communal property'. Once again, it is useful to emphasize that one does not thereby need in each specific case an *empirical* discovery of the specific form of the original property: it seems safe to assert that given existing techniques of historical research, this would be virtually impossible in a number of cases. On the other hand, by looking at *historical* situations of instituted relations of class exploitation in pre-capitalist societies in terms of the categorical opposites *community/external domination*, one obtains a perspective into the historical process in which such forms of property are embedded, and it becomes possible thereby to conceptualize the contradictory character inherent in all such instituted forms of exploitation. Marx, for instance, gives the example of one clan conquered by another:

The fundamental condition of property resting on the clan system (into which the community originally resolves itself) . . . makes the clan conquered by another clan *propertyless* and throws it among the *inorganic conditions* of the conqueror's reproduction, to which the conquering community relates as its own. Slavery and serfdom are thus only further developments of the forms of property resting on the clan system. They necessarily modify all the latter's forms.⁵⁰

Thus, in this particular case, community is prior; slavery or serfdom are developments on the 'original' communal forms. It is clearly possible to generalize this logical sequence of conceptualization of evolving forms of property for every other process of the imposition of exploitative relations based on the superiority of physical force. In fact, Marx himself states this quite directly:

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 486.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 493.

Property, then, originally means—in its Asiatic, Slavonic, ancient classical, Germanic form—the relation of the working (producing or self-reproducing) subject to the conditions of his production or reproduction as his own. . . . This relation as proprietor—not as a result but as a pre-supposition of labour, i.e. of production—presupposes the individual defined as a member of a clan or community (whose property the individual himself is, up to a certain point). Slavery, bondage etc., where the worker himself appears among the natural conditions of production for a third individual or community . . . —i.e. property no longer the relation of the working individual to the objective conditions of labour—is always secondary, derived, never original, although [it is] a necessary and logical result of property founded on the community and labour in the community.⁵¹

Feudal State Formations

A feudal mode of power can, therefore, be seen to operate within a specific state formation only in opposition to a conception of social authority based on the community. In all political formations in which there exists an institutionalized sphere of class domination based ultimately on the direct superiority of physical force, it is in constant battle against subordinate forces seeking to assert (perhaps reassert) an alternative mode of power and authority based on the notion of the community. The *effective limits of domination* at any point of time are thus the *resultant* at that time of this inherently contradictory process.

By looking at the question of power in feudal political formations as the opposition between *feudal jurisdiction/community*, we are thus able to conceptualize the political process of struggle in these societies in terms of the opposites *domination/resistance*.

I cannot at this stage attempt anything like a full-scale examination of the many analytical implications of this framework. Here I will only take a few illustrations, drawn mainly from European history, to show what I think are some of the advantages of using this approach and also to point out some of the major problems which will need much greater clarification than is possible at the moment.

A central question, for instance, is the one of defining 'servitude', or conversely, 'freedom', in the context of feudal relations of production. Within the theory of modes of production, servitude would, of course, be defined in terms of the specific form of the 'property' connection between the labourer and non-labourer elements in a feudal system of production. That is to say, 'property' or the conditions of labour here

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 495-6.

are such that while the labourer possesses the means of his labour, he himself is part of the conditions of production for the non-labourer, in this case the lord, i.e. the labourer is a part of the landlord's 'property'. This defines the labourer's servitude, and a part of his labour (or its product) is appropriated by the lord as rent, whatever the specific form of appropriation. The lord's right to rent is thus a function of his rights of 'property' in the labourer's 'person' (exclusive of course of his means of labour). That is to say, these are rights amounting to the 'appropriation of an alien will',⁵² i.e. rights extending into the 'life-process' of the labourer as distinct from the 'labour-process'. (This last qualification is what distinguishes servitude from slavery, because in the latter the master's rights of property in the slave's person include his means of labour as well—the slave is 'propertyless'.) These rights, however, have their basis in a direct relation of political domination by the lord over his 'subjects'. The appropriation of rent is directly dependent on the superiority of physical force.

Thus defined, servitude cannot only have different forms, depending in one aspect on the specific form in which the surplus is appropriated as rent, but can also vary in the range of incidence as well as in intensity. Thus, the form of rent could be cash, kind or labour, or a combination of these. As a limiting case, the non-producer element could even be organized in the form of a state and the exaction of the surplus could take the form of a tax or revenue. And the quantum of rent could vary greatly. The exact form and magnitude of feudal exaction is determined as the outcome of a process of struggle between the rent-exacting classes and the subordinate peasantry: this is what determines in any given context the specific meaning of 'servitude' or 'freedom'.

In most historical examples of such struggles, the form is one of a battle over 'rights'—the determination of the respective spheres of feudal jurisdiction and peasant rights. What is interesting in the European evidence is that the sphere of peasant rights is virtually coextensive with 'communal rights'. Duby is quite definite about what a 'free peasantry' meant in early medieval Europe:

What was meant by [freedom] was not personal independence but the fact of belonging to the 'folk' (*populus*), of being answerable to public institutions. . . . The right to bear arms, to follow the war-leader on expeditions undertaken each spring, and so to share in the eventual profits of war, all constituted the basic criteria of liberty. Freedom also implied the duty of

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 500-1.

assembling at regular intervals to declare the law and to do justice. Finally, it gave men a voice in the collective exploitation of patches of wasteland and in decisions on whether or not to welcome newcomers to the community of 'neighbours' (*vicini*).⁵³

The extension of feudal jurisdiction and the increasing servitude of the peasantry essentially meant the erosion of institutionalized communal rights.

The most important gains made by the great estates took place at the expense, not of neighbouring estates, but of the still independent peasantry. Some peasant resistance was encountered within the nascent village community. Associations of 'neighbours' were gathering strength around the parish church and the collective possession of customary rights. It is even possible (for the class struggle may now have assumed this basic pattern) that peasants had been forming special associations to protect them from oppression by the rich.⁵⁴

In many of the Romanized provinces, however, peasant freedom was eroded considerably. 'Nevertheless', Duby points out, 'the loss of liberty was not total',⁵⁵ and even among the most dominated serf populations, communal solidarity was kept alive in such residual institutions as communal drinking:

The humblest workers in this poverty-stricken world would indulge in merrymaking, the object of which was now and then to rekindle a sense of brotherhood and to command the goodwill of the invisible powers through communal, short-lived and joyful destruction of wealth in the midst of a universe of privation. Such were *potationes*, ritual drinking bouts of

⁵³ Georges Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century*, tr. Howard B. Clarke (London, 1970), p. 33. Also see the excellent survey of the social forms of the medieval European peasantry in Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free* (London, 1973), pp. 25-134. It may be added here that the question of servitude or freedom should not be confused with notions of 'equality' for there was considerable inequality among the medieval European peasantry. See Rodney Hilton, 'Reasons for Inequality among Medieval Peasants', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 5:3 (Apr. 1978), pp. 271-84.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94. In the case of the Frankish kingdom, Mitteis says: 'The Frankish constitution may be defined as personal monarchy based upon folk-law. One sphere of national life remained, at least initially, outside the sphere of monarchy: the administration of justice was almost exclusively in the hands of the community, until at last royal influence began to infiltrate even this citadel of folk-law.' Heinrich Mitteis, *The State in the Middle Ages*, tr. H. F. Orton (Amsterdam, 1975), pp. 46-7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34

alcoholic beverages, aiming at one and the same time to half-open the gates of the unknowable and to reinforce group cohesion for mutual protection.⁵⁶

Not only this. In the constant battle between feudal forces striving for greater dominance and the resistance of a subordinate peasantry waged through a wide variety of means ranging from deception to open rebellion, the balance of forces can be seen to oscillate in terms of the relative recognition of 'feudal' and 'communal' rights in the established structure of law, whether customary or codified.⁵⁷ Thus, the success of peasant resistance would often be marked by the grant of charters of liberties which would mean greater autonomy for village institutions;⁵⁸ on the other hand, increasing feudal power would mean not just a rise in the quantum of exaction but an extension of the sphere of feudal 'jurisdiction' in the matter of administering 'justice'. It is this structure of 'rights' which expressed the specific combination of the two contradictory modes of power in a given state structure. The balance was seldom stationary, and the resultant at any given moment of this struggle between the two opposing forces provided a definition of the 'degree' of servitude of the subordinate peasantry.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵⁷ In his classic study of medieval monarchy, Fritz Kern remarks: 'The medieval monarch, in a certain sense, was merely a communal head.' Thus, for a long time the monarch was chosen by kin-right. 'There is no need to deny that in most cases kin-right was supported by the overwhelmingly superior power and wealth of the royal house, and also by considerations of political expediency . . . (but) mere expediency is entirely insufficient to explain the tenacity with which folk-belief held fast to the notion of royal magic. . . .' Later, even after kin-right was transformed into hereditary right, 'this absolutism in practice never developed into absolutism in theory, and this, from our point of view, is the decisive point'. That is to say, ' . . . the general conviction that the community's duty of obedience was not unconditional was deeply-rooted, and no one doubted that every member of the 'folk' had the right to resist and to take revenge if he were prejudiced in his rights by the prince. . . . This relationship . . . must not be designated simply as contract. The fundamental idea is rather that ruler and ruled alike are bound to the law; the fealty of both parties is in reality fealty to the law. . . . If, therefore, the king breaks the law, he automatically forfeits any claim to the obedience of his subjects.' Fritz Kern, *Kingship and Law in the Middle Ages*, tr. S. B. Chrimes (Oxford, 1956), pp. 6, 14, 81, 87.

⁵⁸ The most well-known set of such charters—the *Weistümer*—comes from late medieval Germany. See two recent studies on the content of these charters: David Sabeau, 'German Agrarian Institutions at the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century: Upper Swabia as an Example', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 3:1 (Oct. 1975), pp. 76-88; Heide Wunder, 'Village Community, Landlord and Political Power: Problems of Interaction in Early Modern Prussia': paper presented to the Peasants Seminar, University of London, 1978.

The Communal Mode of Power in Feudal State Formations

Of course, since it is politics we are talking about, and politics of a sort carried out within the regularly ordered process of a relatively stable state formation, notions of authority, legitimacy, jurisdiction, resistance, rebellion, must be seen as incorporated within a unified and apparently consistent system of beliefs representing the dominant social ideology. The normal 'function' of such ideologies is always to provide legitimacy to existing structures of domination. In large and well-developed kingdoms and empires, this takes on the elaborate cultural form of a state-wise religion tying peasant communities, towns and state into a single 'great tradition'.⁵⁹ Yet, the process of legitimation itself contains within it—in myths, rituals, ceremonies, customary practices, cultural institutions, literary and aesthetic ideals, and in such values as kinship, reciprocity, paternalism, mutual trust, and so on—the signs of feudal dominium coming to terms in a relatively stable balance of forces with the world of the peasant communities. As a result, the same set of ethical norms or religious practices which justify existing relations of domination also contain, in a single dialectical unity, the justification for legitimate revolt. Let me give just one example of a phenomenon that has been noticed on numerous occasions in many different places and periods. During the revolt in Catalonia in 1640, 'rumours of strange and miraculous events spread with extraordinary speed. When the troops burnt the church of Riurdarenes, tears were seen to fall from the eyes of the Virgin in a picture of the church.' The bishop pronounced this rumour a sacrilege.

It was only one step from excommunication by the bishop to a proclamation by the rebels that they were fighting for God and their churches. Inevitably, the episcopal censure was regarded by the insurgents as a complete vindication of their activities. It gave the rising the character of a Holy War—an idea already suggested by the miraculous tears of the Virgin and encouraged by the clergy and members of the religious orders, who told them that divine retribution was now being meted out to soldiers whom temporal justice had failed to punish.⁶⁰

It is this inherent contradictoriness of established ideologies in feudal society which creates the possibility for these sudden inversions in signification which are so much a feature of peasant revolts. The

⁵⁹ Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago, 1956).

⁶⁰ J. H. Elliott, *The Revolt of the Catalans: A Study in the Decline of Spain (1598-1640)* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 426-7.

anthropologist Victor Turner has suggested that these events, and particularly the millenarian ideologies which often accompany revolts of this kind, should be seen as a kind of liminal behaviour, specifically as rituals of status reversal.⁶¹ He argues that when society acquires a specific structure in terms of jural, political and economic positions—‘differentiated, culturally structured, segmented and often hierarchical system of institutionalised positions’⁶²—resistance or revolt often takes on the form of what he calls *communitas*. ‘Beyond the structural lies *communitas*’; in contrast to segmented and hierarchical society, there is now a ‘direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities’ and a belief in a model of society which is homogeneous, unstructured *communitas*.⁶³ Several features of millenarian movements have the properties of liminality, their rituals those of rites of passage: homogeneity, equality, anonymity, absence of property, reduction of all to the same status level, the wearing of uniform apparel, sexual continence (or its antithesis, sexual community), minimization of sex distinctions, abolition of rank, humility, disregard for personal appearance, unselfishness, total obedience to the prophet or leader, sacred instruction, the maximization of religious (as opposed to secular) attitudes and behaviour, suspension of kinship rights and obligations, simplicity of speech and manners, sacred folly, acceptance of pain and suffering.⁶⁴ Of course, the spontaneity and immediacy of *communitas* can hardly be sustained for long. Soon it returns to the domain of structure, either reverting to the old segmentations and hierarchies, or perhaps to a structure modified by the impact of the revolt. The revolt is only a moment in the historical process of domination/resistance. Its structure is to be found not in any novel reorganization of social relations, but rather, ‘in Lévi-Straussian way’, in ‘the lurid and colourful imagery of the apocalyptic myths generated in the milieu of existential *communitas*’.⁶⁵ The power of the community is ‘structured’ in ideology: ‘rules that abolish minutiae of structural differentiation in, for example, the domains of kinship, economics, and political structure

⁶¹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (London, 1969), p. 167.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

liberate the human structural propensity and gives it free reign in the cultural realm of myth, ritual and symbol'⁶⁶—'an almost febrile, visionary and prophetic poetry [is] their main genre of cultural utterance'.⁶⁷

One can, in fact, go further and note the many other possibilities which arise because of the contradictory character of ideologies legitimizing structures of domination—the many ambiguities in meaning which create possibilities for manoeuvre both by forces seeking to consolidate or extend their domination in tune with changing circumstances and by subordinate groups rising in revolt. I cite two examples, this time from a completely different historical situation. Among tribes in southern and eastern Africa with political formations made up of different types of combination of corporate kin authority and centralized state structures, there often exist two sorts of religious cults and rituals—one involving 'spirits of the household' invoked by lineage sections or segmented kin groups, and the other consisting of 'spirits of the land' invoked for the well-being of the country, defined in terms of territory, in which all, irrespective of kin linkages, take part. The history of the Mang'anja people, for instance, shows that with successive waves of migration and conquest, and the re-establishment of a political order following each of these upheavals, these cults expressing different combinations of kin solidarity and hierarchic rule have taken different forms and have been manipulated to serve different ruling interests.⁶⁸ Conversely, at the time of the 1896 uprising against white colonial rulers in southern Rhodesia, the rebel leadership of Mkwati attempted to unify in a common cause the traditionally hostile Ndebele and Shona tribesmen (the Shona were tributary tribes of Ndebele). He did this by appealing to the memories of the pre-Ndebele past and by invoking the Mlimo cult by which kinship ties are supposed to have been established among the various tribes through a woman who was made 'grand-mother' of all the Matabele peoples. Mkwati, therefore, was not

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 133.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 153.

⁶⁸ Matthew Schoffeleers, 'The History and Political Role of the M'Bona Cult among the Mang'anja', in T. O. Ranger and I. N. Kimambo (eds.), *The Historical Study of African Religions* (London, 1972), pp. 73-94. Also see I. N. Kimambo and C. K. Omari, 'The Development of Religious Thought and Centres among the Pare', in *ibid.*, pp. 111-21.

merely using the support provided by a 'traditional' religious system. He was transforming the material provided by these religious elements 'into something more radical and revolutionary'. Mkwati's was, therefore, 'a prophetic leadership operating over and above all the restrictions implied by hierarchic order and links with the past'.

He had no claim before the rising to be the senior Mwari cult representative. It was just before and especially during the rising that he emerged as 'the great Mlimo'. . . . When he did so it was with a revolutionary message and a revolutionary set of instructions. His followers were promised invulnerability and even immortality; they entered a new society which transcended the old. . . . When the rising became really desperate, the authority of the Mkwati and the other cult officers who had chosen the same path was elevated above that of 'traditional' political authority; *indunas* and chiefs were deposed. For however brief a period Mkwati was seeking not merely to co-ordinate but to create a 'new order'.⁶⁹

This last example also points to another important feature of communal authority: the ability to *produce* a suitable leadership when the community needs to resist external forces of domination. Communal resistance could, of course, be carried out under the leadership of customarily recognized communal leaders and through the medium of traditional communal institutions. On the other hand, since it is the community as a whole which is the source of all authority, no one is a permanent repository of delegated powers. Hence, when the need arises, traditional leaders may suddenly be replaced or superseded by new ones who have had no previous standing in the customarily recognized arrangement of communal authority. This is a feature very common in historical examples of peasant revolts. It also makes it possible for the community to act as a community in specific instances of resistance even when there do not exist under normal circumstances any recognized institutional arrangements for the exercise of communal authority.

The structure of communal authority must be located primarily in the domain of ideology. It is possible, of course, as we have seen in some of the examples discussed above, for a given peasant community to possess specific institutional arrangements for the self-regulation of communal life when specialized state institutions are absent, or even when it operates in a vaguely and flexibly demarcated field

⁶⁹ T. O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896-7: A Study in African Resistance* (London, 1967), p. 214.

within a larger state structure. However, within a dialectical process defined principally in terms of domination/resistance, the institutional structures are best seen as representing a certain temporary state of equilibrium within a definite system of production and a definite arrangement of the relations of dominance/subordination. The principal dynamics *within* such a system, i.e. the class struggle *within* a specific pre-capitalist formation, must be located fundamentally in the political ('extra-economic', if you will) domain of the struggle over 'rights'. And, here, depending on the specific strategic configuration of the struggle, not only can the agents of communal authority change suddenly and spectacularly, but even the definition of the community—its boundaries—can shift. The strategic configuration may vary with changing techno-economic conditions of production or with changes in the feudal organization of power. But the conditions which make possible a specific expression of the identity and authority of a community in a specific context of struggle must be located above all in the domain of ideology.⁷⁰

If one looks once again at the evidence on the European peasantry in the medieval age, the smallest communal unit appears to be the village, defined territorially as the agglomeration of contiguous parcels of land each of which is referred to as the *manse* or the *huba* or the hide, and each of which is occupied by an individual household.

We understand by this an enclosure, solidly rooted to its site by a permanent barrier such as a palisade or a living hedge, carefully maintained, a protected asylum to which the entry was forbidden and the violation of which was punished by severe penalties: an island of refuge where the occupant was assumed to be the master and at whose threshold communal servitude and the demands of chiefs and lords stopped short.⁷¹

⁷⁰ It is worth suggesting a clarification here to a problem which often crops up in attempts to use the term 'peasantry' as an economic category for describing a certain productive organization of society. Entirely justified criticisms have been made of conceptions such as a 'peasant' or a 'domestic' mode of production. See for example, Judith Ennew, Paul Hirst and Keith Tribe, "'Peasantry" as an Economic Category', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 4:4 (July 1977), pp. 295-322. Yet the problem has persisted bringing within the received range of analytical categories phenomena relating to the *political* role of the peasantry in feudal or other state formations. The proposal here is to construct an explicit set of categories relating to the specification of the 'property' connection in different social formations, thus providing the analytical complement to the set of 'economic' categories describing a mode of production.

⁷¹ Georges Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*, tr. Cynthia Postan (London, 1968), p. 7.

However, in the European case, this territorial definition of the village as the sum of the *manses*, the arable land and the meadows, grazing grounds, forests etc., used by the community is coupled with a specific institutional arrangement:

The unity of the *terroir* is always sanctioned and embodied by a communal body, the 'assembly of inhabitants', which abides by traditional rulings and occasionally makes new ones to ensure that where the exploitation of the land is the concern of the community it operates in the common interest. . . . What normally complicates (or perhaps simplifies) matters is that the parish 'religious' assembly often became identified in the long run with the 'agricultural' assembly of inhabitants, where concurrent debates tackled material problems to do with the church, agrarian problems to do with the *terroir* and even fiscal problems, principally those raised by the collection of royal taxation.⁷²

Underlying the territorial definition, then, is a *social* conception of the group as united by ties of solidarity. In other contexts, these could take on the more explicit form of ties of kinship—real affinal connections, or imagined (perhaps fabricated) beliefs of common lineage, or lineages related to one another in specific ways that are sanctified in mythology and ritual. These bonds of affinity contain possibilities of manipulation. Thus, the boundaries of community could vary with varying contexts of collective action. The point which distinguishes the communal mode from other modes or organization of power is this: here it is *not* a perception of common interests which compels organization to achieve unity; there is rather the conviction that bonds of affinity *already exist* which then become the natural presupposition for collective action.

The State-Lord-Peasant Triad

One important element which affects the context of communal resistance is the feudal organization of power. A specific feudal structure has its own history, encompassing movements of population, conquest and subjugation, the stabilization of complex relations of obligation and reciprocity with the subordinate population, incorporation into larger state structures, and so on. In developed kingdoms and empires, these could acquire an elaborate hierarchical structure of overlordship and vassalage. On the other hand, the

⁷² Pierre Goubert, *The Ancien Régime: French Society 1600-1750*, tr. Steve Cox (London, 1973), pp. 78-9.

dominant power structure could take on the form of an overarching state bureaucracy with the complex hierarchical organization of the military-bureaucratic nobility. Political struggles in this situation can be analysed within the framework of a triad: king/state—lords/officials—peasantry. Various strategic combinations of the three elements are possible. One often finds in the history of medieval peasant revolts occasions in which the externality and distance of the monarchy can make it the ideological ally of a peasantry engaged in a struggle with local lords and officials. Thus, Elliott writes of the Catalan revolt of 1640:

Even though more than a century of royal absenteeism had gradually weakened the patriarchal and formal ties between the king and his Catalan subjects they still looked upon him as a father who—if once the just complaints of his children were allowed to reach his ears—would promptly act to right their wrongs and remove the cause of their distresses. If the rebel bands shouted ‘Death to traitors!’ they also shouted, with equal enthusiasm, ‘Long live the king!’ The instinctive loyalty of the peasantry to a king they scarcely knew is not really very surprising.⁷³

Then again, in France at the time of the *ancien régime*, the peasantry resisted the domination of all those rural patriarchs who collected ‘feudal rights’. Here, writes Goubert,

- (a) The king and kingship inspire loyalty and love;
- (b) But there is deep-seated resentment of the financial methods of the monarchy, although it is hoped that the good king and the States-General will reform them;
- (c) The majority protest against various feudal rights, or against all of them, or against the principle of them . . .
- (d) There is at least equally powerful resentment, not of the principle of tithes but of the way they are collected, their unfairness, exorbitance and inconsistencies, and above all of the fact that they have been diverted from their original aim (hardly any of the *cabiers* are hostile to religion itself) . . .⁷⁴

And yet, the events leading up to the Revolution were to culminate in popular action against the person of the king and his family. On the other hand, there are numerous instances in the history of medieval kingdoms and empires where the peasantry, especially in outlying and peripheral regions, are found resisting the encroachments of the larger kingdom in alliance with local chiefs and magnates. The

⁷³ Elliott, *op. cit.*, p. 468.

⁷⁴ Goubert, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

externality of the institution of monarchy makes its position quite ambivalent in relation to the present communities.

It is even possible to argue that there exists in peasant ideology a distinction between kings and kingship, and that a revolt against a king is not necessarily a revolt against kingship. That is to say, political struggles in feudal society, defined as a process of domination/resistance and occurring in a strategic context defined by relations within the state-landlord-peasantry triad, can be seen as a political process *within* a particular feudal state formation. As Gluckman says of rebellions in African kingdoms:

... societies which have a stagnant techno-economy have conflicts which can be resolved by changing the individuals occupying office or in relationship with one another, without changing the pattern of the offices or relationships. Politically, it means that a rebellion changes the king, but does not affect the kingship—nay, may even strengthen the kingship, against a tyrant who has broken its norms. Secondly, it means that the territorial sections of a kingdom struggle against the central power and each other, without disrupting the central authority.⁷⁵

The distinction between the modes of power thus enables us to define the field of possibilities: a specific combination within the state-lord-peasant triad then becomes open to specific explanations in particular historical contexts. But thereby it also enables us to discuss the conditions which make possible the suppression, dissolution or re-appropriation of particular modes of power in the wider historical context of the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

The Modes of Power Under Capitalism

The transition to capitalism, i.e. the historical triumph of the capitalist mode of production, also implies the rise to dominance in the state formation of a new mode of exercise of power. I have described earlier the main features of what I have called the *bourgeois* mode of power. I will not elaborate on it any further here, since, while the central attributes of the ideological conception of the state in liberal constitutional theory are well known, the actual mechanisms of the exercise of class domination in capitalist societies are a subject of considerable dispute and debate. It is not possible to stretch the implications of the framework proposed above so as to make a contribution to any of those specific debates until much further work

⁷⁵ Max Gluckman, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa* (London, 1963), pp. 86-7.

is carried out into historical materials on the development of political institutions and processes in the modern period. The following comments are, therefore, entirely tentative and hypothetical.

First of all, it may be worth reconsidering the histories of the emergence of the capitalist nation-states of the world in order to delineate the specific paths by which a characteristically bourgeois mode of power gains ascendancy. It is certain that even in the most classical case of the rise to hegemony of the bourgeoisie and the complete sway of a capitalist mode of production, the evolution of *political* processes will reveal non-linearities, zigzags, disjunctures as well as continuities, representing numerous compromises with other modes of the exercise of power, and the survival and perhaps ultimate appropriation of feudal institutions, conceptions and forms of authority. One is reminded here of that rather cryptic comment by Marx in the *Grundrisse*. Talking about the *master-servant relation* in which the presupposition is that of 'the appropriation of an alien will', Marx remarks:

... it forms a necessary ferment for the development and the decline and fall of all original relations of property and of production, just as it also expresses their limited nature. Still, it is reproduced—in mediated form—in capital, and thus likewise forms a ferment of its dissolution and is an emblem of its limitation.⁷⁶

The identification of the specific differences in the rise of dominance of the bourgeois mode of power, and in the limits to this dominance, is central to a historical understanding of class struggles in individual capitalist countries in the phase of the rise of capitalism.

Here, a preliminary analytical tool would be the distinction between the modes of power. If one looks once again at the description given by Brenner of the difference in the transition processes in each of the European countries, one can immediately identify the main elements which describe the class struggles in this period: a feudalism in crisis, a rising bourgeoisie, the absolutist state, varying levels of organization of feudal power, varying degrees of solidarity among the peasantry. The first two elements describe what is potentially 'new' in the situation; together, they create the conditions of possibility for a transition. The specific process of transition would, however, be marked by a series of strategic configurations, shifting

⁷⁶ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 501.

from point to point according to the changing relative strengths and positions of each of these elements. An explicit categorization of the modes of power would, it seems to me, provide the necessary analytical complement to the task of identifying the techno-economic conditions for a transition: together, they not only provide a complete analytical encapsulation of the 'real appropriation' as well as the 'property' connections which describe a mode of production, but they also enable us to locate the element of 'indeterminacy' in the domain of the political.

The second point concerns the question of the peasantry in social formations dominated in some way or other by capitalism. It seems reasonable to argue that the establishment of bourgeois hegemony over all structures of society requires not so much the abolition of feudal institutions or feudal conceptions and symbols of authority, for these could in fact be appropriated and subsumed within a dominant bourgeois mode of exercise of power. What it requires rather is the dissolution of the peasantry as a distinct social form of existence of productive labour, and hence the extinction of a communal mode of power. To the extent that a peasantry continues to exist as peasantry in a society dominated by a capitalism, it represents a limit to bourgeois hegemony.

This precisely is the kind of problem one encounters in countries which retain the character of large agrarian societies in the modern period of history. The usual features here are the intrusion of new extractive mechanisms into the agrarian economy, often with the active legal and armed support of a colonial political authority, leading to a systematic commercialization of agriculture and the incorporation in varying degrees of the agrarian economy into a larger capitalist world-market; the growth of a new industrial sector, usually of a limited nature in comparison with the absolute size of the economy and with varying combinations of foreign, 'comprador' and 'national' capital; the growth of new political institutions and processes based on bourgeois conceptions of law, bureaucracy and representation. The result is a differential impact on pre-capitalist structures—sometimes destroying them, sometimes modifying them to fit in with the new demands of surplus extraction and the new procedures of governance, and at other times keeping intact, perhaps bolstering, pre-existing productive systems and local organizations of power while merely establishing a suitable extractive

mechanism.⁷⁷ The analytical problems which arise in the course of characterizing the relations of production or state formations which develop in these situations are numerous, and have been much debated.

The usual analytical frame in which the impact of a colonial economy on the peasantry is studied is one of differentiation—the growth of different strata within the peasantry and the progressive increase in the differences between them in terms of incomes, assets and economic viability. The problem that is often encountered, however, is that of relating this process to the political role of the peasantry in colonial (and post-colonial) societies. For here, once again, we find many asymmetries between the changing patterns of solidarity within the peasantry in their political actions and the structures of interests one would expect to find if the peasantry were seen as an amalgam of differentiated strata. Many unexpected possibilities are created here because of the combination of different modes of power—the conscious organization of group interests into larger alliances or coalitions, the continued perception of state institutions as agencies of external domination, the sudden expressions of solidarity on the presupposition that there already exist affinal bonds (which now begin to be called, in contrast with the new modes of organization of interests, ‘primordial loyalties’), and the countless avenues of manipulation, mobilization and appropriation into larger structures of power that are opened up as a consequence. Talking about the innovations in the mechanisms of power in modern-day capitalist society, Michel Foucault has drawn our attention to the ‘capillary form of existence’ of power, ‘the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives. The eighteenth century invented, so to speak, a synaptic regime of power, a regime of its exercise *within* the social body, rather than *from above* it. . . . This more-or-less coherent modification in the small-scale modes of exercise of power was made possible only by a fundamental structural change. It was the instituting of this new local, capillary form of power which impelled society to

⁷⁷ For a remarkably incisive description of these differential effects in a specific region, see the study of the evolution of village communities in Wallachia and Moldavia from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries in Henri H. Stahl, *Traditional Romanian Village Communities*, tr. Daniel Chirot and Holley Coulter Chirot (Cambridge, 1980).

eliminate certain elements such as the court and the king.⁷⁸ Foucault has sought to demonstrate the complexities of this novel regime of power in his studies of the history of mental illness, of clinical practice, of the prison, of sexuality and of the rise of the human sciences. When one looks at regimes of power in the so-called backward countries of the world today, not only does the dominance of the characteristically 'modern' modes of exercise of power seem limited and qualified by the persistence of older modes, but by the fact of their combination in a particular state formation, it seems to open up at the same time an entirely new range of possibilities for the ruling classes to exercise their domination.

Glossary

<i>adivasi</i>	Autochthonous population; member of a scheduled tribe.
<i>amla</i>	Landlord's managerial staff.
<i>arkati</i>	A recruiter of labour for plantations, roadworks, railways, etc.
<i>bakasht</i>	Land originally cultivated by tenants but 're-sumed' by landlords on the ground of non-payment of rent and let out again usually though not always to share-croppers; – <i>malik</i> : lit under the owner's cultivation.
<i>baksheesh,</i> <i>bakshish</i>	Gratuity; tip.
<i>bandh</i>	Mud bank built for flood control.
<i>bataidar</i>	Share-cropper
<i>batta</i>	Commission.
<i>begar</i>	Forced labour.
<i>benami</i>	Land fraudulently held under a fictitious name.
<i>bhoodan</i>	Lit. gift of land; name of a movement initiated by Vinoba Bhave in the wake of the Telengana peasant uprising to persuade landlords to part voluntarily with one-sixth of their estates for distribution among the landless villagers.
<i>bidroha</i>	Uprising; rebellion.
<i>chaukidar,</i> <i>chowkidar</i>	Village watchman; locally appointed member of auxiliary police force.
<i>cutcherry</i>	Landlord's estate office.
<i>daroga</i>	Sub-inspector of police.
<i>dhing</i>	Word for disturbance, uprising, etc. in a dialect of northern Bengal.
<i>diara</i>	Alluvial land gained by recession of a river.
<i>diku</i>	Foreigner; outsider.

<i>diwan</i>	Manager of a landlord's estate.
<i>gramdan</i>	Gift made of an entire village as a part of the land distribution movement inspired by Vinoba Bhave's 'sarvodaya' doctrine.
<i>hool</i>	Uprising; disturbance. Used often to describe the Santal insurrection of 1855.
<i>inqalab zindabad</i>	'Long live revolution': words often chanted in the course of militant demonstrations.
<i>jila</i>	District.
<i>kari</i>	Archer.
<i>karori</i>	Revenue collector.
<i>katcha seer</i>	Unit of weight amounting approximately to 900 gms.
<i>khadi</i>	Fabric made of hand-spun yarn and used mostly for wear as a sign of commitment to the nationalist cause.
<i>kisan</i>	Cultivator; farmer; peasant; agricultural worker.
<i>kotha</i>	Small plot of land given to an attached or bonded labourer in lieu of cash wages.
<i>kutcherry</i>	See <i>cutcherry</i> .
<i>larai</i>	Fight; struggle.
<i>ma-baap</i>	Lit. mother and father. A term often used to represent the relation between the peasants and superordinate elite authorities as one between children and parents.
<i>makai khet</i>	Maize field.
<i>mansab</i>	A rank in the bureaucracy of the Mughal State.
<i>mustajir</i>	A revenue-farmer in Mughal India.
<i>padyatra</i>	Ritual walk for a cause practised on a large scale during the <i>bhoodan</i> (q.v.) movement.
<i>paik</i>	Foot-soldier.
<i>prakhand</i>	Community Development Block.
<i>rabi</i>	Winter crop such as wheat, gram, etc. in Bihar.
<i>raiyyat, ryot</i>	Tenant cultivator.
<i>sadar</i>	Small town serving as the headquarters of district administration in colonial India.
<i>sardar</i>	Chief; leader.
<i>salami</i>	Commission.

<i>thana</i>	Police station: its jurisdiction; the building where it is located.
<i>thanadar</i>	A local military commander in Mughal India.
<i>tola</i>	Hamlet.
<i>vagarthāviva samprktau</i>	Lit. 'blended like word and meaning'. A phrase used by Kalidasa in <i>Raghuvamsam</i> .
<i>waqai-navis</i>	News reporter.

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